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India, Sri Lanka carry out naval exercise

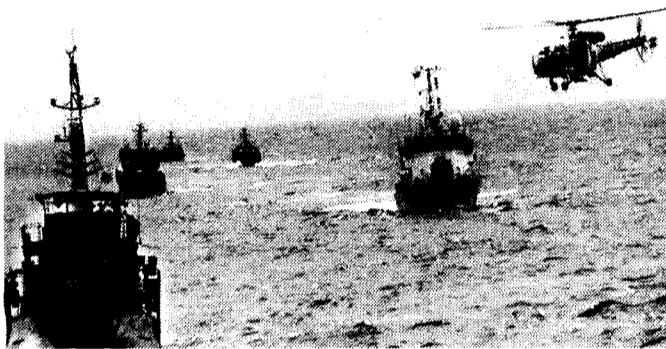
By V.S. Sambandan

COLOMBO, DEC. 16. The refrain, *Sare jahaan se acha, Hindustan hamara*, played to perfection by the Sri Lankan naval band on board the Sri Lankan ship, SLNS Sayura, marked the beginning of Operation Eksath — the first joint naval exercise between the two countries — about 10 nautical miles off Colombo this morning.

The non-combat, three-hour humanitarian exercise saw seven ships — two Indian and five Sri Lankan — sail out to the open sea and perform the joint exercises in three areas: search and rescue, anti-piracy and pollution control.

The exercise, official sources said, aimed at maintaining preparedness to ensure the "safety and security of international shipping and lives at sea." The Director-General of the Indian Coast Guard, A.K. Singh, the Indian High Commissioner, Nirupama Rao, the Sri Lankan service commanders and the Secretaries for Defence and Public Security were among those who observed the exercise.

As the SLNS Sayura gives way to the Indian CGS Sarang to lead the formation and the exercises, the mood on board the Sayura is one of expectation. The excitement soars as an Indian Coast Guard Chetak helicopter flies past the ships. After hovering low near the vessels, the Chetak recedes to the backdrop as the formation heads to



A Coast Guard helicopter hovers over a column of Indian and Sri Lankan ships during a joint naval exercise off Colombo on Thursday.

the open sea.

In addition to CGS Sarang, CGS Durgabhai Deshmukh, the Chetak helicopter and a Dornier aircraft comprised the Indian component.

Four other Sri Lankan vessels joined the SLNS Sayura on the choppy waters.

As Sri Lankan naval cadets and officers go through their ceremonial salutes and on-deck formations, a Fast Attack Craft of the island's Navy and an Indian Coast Guard ship carry out an anti-piracy exercise in a distance.

The exercise, a Sri Lankan officer told journalists on board the Sayura, is aimed at equipping the Navy to intercept, board and regain control of a hijacked vessel.

Search and rescue

"Next we will carry out a search and rescue operation," announces Rohan Amaras-

inghe, the commanding officer of the Sayura.

The Chetak helicopter is back, and as it flies between the ships, a trained Indian naval diver "falls" into the sea. A distress signal blinks to indicate the presence of the "drowning man." Within minutes, the friendly drone of a Dornier is heard and seconds later the fixed-wing aircraft flies over the "man in distress," and drops a life raft. The Chetak hoists the "victim" to the safety of the coast guard vessel.

In the distance is Colombo's main thoroughfare — the Galle Road — and the Galle Face Green, which was witness to several historic moments in the island-nation's history.

As the CGS Sarang sails past the Sayura, Capt. Amarasinghe, his officers and men, raise their hands to a crisp naval salute, marking another moment in ties between the two countries.

17 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

ফিরলেন শাহরুখরা, হামলার নিন্দায় দিল্লি

নয়াদিল্লি, ১২ ডিসেম্বর: কলম্বো থেকে নিরাপদে দেশে ফিরে এসেছেন শাহরুখ, প্রীতি, সইফেরা। কাল রাতে শ্রীলঙ্কার রাজধানী শহরে গ্রেনেড হামলা থেকে একটুর জন্য বেঁচে গেলেও এই ঘটনা ভবিষ্যতে তাঁকে বিদেশে অনুষ্ঠান করা থেকে রুখতে পারবে না বলে জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন বলিউডের বাজিগর। বিস্ফোরণে ক্ষতিগ্রস্তদের সহানুভূতি জানাতেও ভোলেননি শাহরুখ। তবে ভারত সরকার সহানুভূতি জানানোর পাশাপাশি এই হামলার কড়া নিন্দা করেছে বলে বিদেশ মন্ত্রকের এক বিবৃতিতে জানানো হয়েছে। এখনও অবধি কোনও গোষ্ঠী হামলার দায় সীকার করেনি। এর পিছনে কারা রয়েছে জানতে তদন্ত শুরু করেছে শ্রীলঙ্কার পুলিশ।

শনিবার রাতে কলম্বোয় রেস কোর্সের খোলা স্টেডিয়ামে ২০ হাজার দর্শকের সামনে বলিউডের তারকাদের এই অনুষ্ঠানের শেষের দিকে গ্রেনেড হামলা চালায় দুকৃতীরা। বিস্ফোরণে তিরিশ বছরের এক মহিলা এবং বাইশ বছরের এক যুবক নিহত হয়েছেন। জখম হন ১৯ জন। আহতদের মধ্যে কয়েকটি শিশুও রয়েছে। প্রাক্তন ক্রিকেটার রবি শাস্ত্রীর স্ত্রী রীতু শাস্ত্রী ছাড়া আর কোনও ভারতীয় অবশ্য আহত হননি। এক প্রত্যক্ষদর্শীর কথায়, “প্রথমে ভেবেছিলাম কোনও বাজি পোড়ানো হয়েছে। কিন্তু যখন দেখলাম



বিস্ফোরণস্থলে তল্লাশি চালাচ্ছে পুলিশ। রবিবার কলম্বোয়।— এ এফ পি

অনেকের শরীর থেকে অঝোরে রক্ত পড়ছে, বুঝলাম কিছু একটা গন্ডগোল হয়েছে।” আর এক প্রত্যক্ষদর্শী জানান যে বিস্ফোরণের ঠিক আগে তিনি এক ব্যক্তিকে মঞ্চ তাক করে কিছু একটা ছুড়তে দেখেছিলেন।

পুলিশ সূত্রের খবর, মঞ্চ লক্ষ্য করেই গ্রেনেড ছোড়া হয়েছিল। সেই সময় মঞ্চ ছিলেন শাহরুখ। তবে একটুর জন্য লক্ষ্যভ্রষ্ট হয়ে দশ হাজার

টাকা মূল্যের ডি আই পি আসনের সামনে গ্রেনেডটি ফাটে। মুহূর্তে শাহরুখকে নিরাপদ জায়গায় সরিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়া হয়। দর্শকসনে শ্রীলঙ্কায় ভারতীয় হাই কমিশনের প্রতিনিধিরাও ছিলেন। কিন্তু একটুর জন্য তাঁরা বেঁচে গিয়েছেন। স্টেডিয়ামে ঢোকার আগে প্রত্যেকের তল্লাশি নেওয়া হয়েছিল। ১,৫০০ সেনা ও পুলিশের মিলিত বাহিনীর কড়া পাহারা থাকা সত্ত্বেও কী

ভাবে সবার চোখ এড়িয়ে দুকৃতী গ্রেনেড নিয়ে স্টেডিয়ামে ঢুকল, তা তদন্ত করে দেখা হচ্ছে।

এ দিকে, এই হামলার জন্য শ্রীলঙ্কা সরকারের গাফিলতিই দায়ী বলে সিংহলি বৌদ্ধ সম্প্রদায়ের সদস্যেরা মনে করছেন। ওমালপে সোবিথা নামে এক শীর্ষ স্তরের বৌদ্ধ সম্মাসী বলেন, “সরকারের উচিত ছিল ভারতীয় অতিথিদের নিরাপত্তার যথাযথ ব্যবস্থা করা। কিন্তু তা না-হওয়ার জন্যই এই দুর্ঘটনা ঘটল। ভারতীয় শিল্পীদের কোনও ক্ষতি হলে আমাদের দেশকেই তার ফল ভুগতে হত।” তাঁর মতে, উঁচু মহলের সাহায্য না-পেলে এমন ঘটনা কখনওই ঘটত না।

প্রসঙ্গত, জলসার দিনটিতেই এই সম্প্রদায়ের এক সম্মাসীর প্রথম মৃত্যুবার্ষিকী হওয়ায় অনুষ্ঠান পিছানোর জন্য সংগঠকদের কাছে দাবি জানিয়েছিলেন বৌদ্ধ সম্মাসীরা। দাবি না মানলে তাঁরা আত্মহত্যা দাবি দেবেন বলেও হুমকি দেওয়া হয়। কিন্তু শাহরুখ ও সংগঠকেরা ক্ষমা চাইলে তাঁরা দাবি তুলে নেন। অনুষ্ঠানে শাহরুখ তাঁর প্রতিশ্রুতি অনুযায়ী মৃত সম্মাসীর উদ্দেশে মিনিট খানেক নীরবতাও পালন করেন। এর পরেও স্টেডিয়ামের বাইরে কয়েক জন ভাঙচুর চালাতে থাকে। অনুষ্ঠানে যাওয়ার সময় দর্শকদের উপরেও হামলা হয়। সন্ধ্যায় প্রায় ১২ জনকে গ্রেফতার করে পুলিশ। — পি টি আই

Mystery hand behind blast

judith b. d. lanka HF-1 18/12

P.K. Balachandran
Colombo, December 12

WHO WAS behind the grenade blast that killed two persons at Shah Rukh Khan's concert in Colombo last night? It's unlikely that the LTTE was involved this time.

The needle of suspicion points to radical elements among Buddhist organisations who were angry with the monks for calling off their protest against the concert's timing, which coincided with the death anniversary of a popular priest.

But the island nation's Buddhist clergy blamed the government for the blast, accusing it of not having taken adequate security measures. "We hold the government responsible for this attack. It is because they did not give adequate security that this happened," Buddhist monk and legislator Omalpe Sobitha said.

Shastri wife injured

Most of the 18 wounded were Sri Lankans, with former cricketer Ravi Shastri's wife Ritu being the lone Indian to be injured. Her shrapnel injuries were, however, minor.

Among those who escaped unhurt were Indian high commissioner Nirupama Rao, Sri Lankan interior secretary Tilak Ranaviraja and former Sri Lankan cricket captain and minister Arjuna Ranatunga.

The performers included Shah Rukh Khan, Preity Zinta, Saif Ali Khan, Priyanka Chopra, Javed Khan and Celina Jaitley, all of whom were unhurt. Shah Rukh, who arrived in India today along with other troupe members, said he would not be deterred from holding similar concerts abroad.

Checklist

LTTE

For most Indians, the Tigers are the obvious suspects. But they couldn't have been behind the attack, trying hard as they are to mollify New Delhi

Janatha Vimukthi

This Sinhala Buddhist and Marxist-Leninist group is anti-Indian. But it's now looking to New Delhi for help in checking Tamil separatism

Jathika Hela Urumaya

This party of Buddhist monks supported the agitation against the concert but changed its stand on the day of the concert

Sinhala Urumaya

Radical party whose members attacked monks after they called off their protest against the concert

"We were shocked but did not panic," said the Indian deputy high commissioner, Mohan Kumar, who had attended the show. "Shah Rukh himself did not seem to be aware of the blast and stopped only when told by the organisers."

"A lot of people, including those on stage, thought it was part of the fireworks," a witness said. "Then, when

people saw some fans bleeding, they realised something was terribly wrong."

New Delhi issued a statement, saying: "The government of India condemns this terrorist incident and the perpetrators of this reprehensible act. We are awaiting the results of the Sri Lankan investigation." The Colombo police said a probe was under way, but they had no suspects yet.



SHAH RUKH WAS HERE The site of the explosion on Sunday.



SHAKEN BUT SAFE Shah Rukh after returning to India on Sunday.

13 DEC 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Sri Lanka: A federal solution?

5.11.99
9/11
S. Kumar
S. Kumar

THE presence in New Delhi of President Kumaratunga last week drew attention to Sri Lanka and to the fact that the peace process in that country is currently in suspended animation. A cease-fire has been in place for over 30 months, largely though not wholly respected by both LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. But there have been no face-to-face meetings between the parties, no discussions that could help bridge the gap between them. The LTTE has come up with a proposal for an Internal Self-Governing Authority which has drawn comment but is not currently part of the agenda for discussions. International mediators remain engaged in trying to get the thing moving again even though recent developments have added further complexity to the situation. With that, there is a growing feeling that India, which has been supportive of the peace process, should play a more active part, though it is not clear what shape this could take.

While the ground situation has held more or less steady, important happenings within the LTTE have their own significance. There has been fierce factional fighting, culminating in the breakaway of Karuna, the potent erstwhile LTTE leader in the Eastern Province. His defection has considerably reduced the capacity of the LTTE. Even then, the outfit has not given up its constant claim to be the sole representative body of Sri Lanka's Tamil population. The LTTE has insisted that its ISGA proposal must be the only basis for negotiations within the peace process. But its reduced strength may have encouraged dangerous thoughts among the most extreme of its opponents, who seem to believe that a military solution to the problem - a decisive military defeat for the LTTE - may not be wholly unthinkable. Fortunately, such sentiments have not adversely affected the commitment of the Lankan authorities to revitalise the peace process.



Chandrika Kumaratunga with Manmohan Singh in New Delhi. — AFP

The political outcome towards which the process is directed is some sort of federalism which would accommodate Tamil sentiment in favour of autonomy while maintaining the unity and integrity of Sri Lanka. Even at the time of the Accord between Rajiv Gandhi and JR Jayawardane which formally brought India into the picture, a federal solution was recognised as the way forward. But while the leaders were able to agree, the diminution of the unitary structure proved to be a bitter pill for hard-line Sinhala opinion to swallow. Proposals to devolve authority to the provinces became watered down, ethnic divisions became increasingly bitter, leading eventually to massive insurgency, death and destruction. Now, after so many years and so much strife, the

wide angle

SALMAN HAIDAR

issue of federalism has come back into serious reckoning. Among the Tamil parties, the realisation has strengthened that there is no Eelam for the

taking, no matter what. It is within this context that the ISGA proposal needs to be seen. It is deliberately maximalist, embodying demands that are not far short of complete separation. Yet, for all its exaggeration, it is a move towards dialogue. And, showing the political courage she has always displayed, in a reaffirmation of her commitment to dialogue, President Kumaratunga has expressed readiness to talk even on the basis of the ISGA.

The international community has been pushing for resumption after the long 30-month hiatus. In the absence of direct con-

tact between the parties themselves, the Norwegians have become an invaluable channel of communication. Although unable to avoid all criticism of the part they are playing, they are currently indispensable to the process. Backing is also provided by Japan, the principal aid giver to Sri Lanka. Moreover, international sentiment has shifted and there is no support anywhere for separatism or terrorism. On the contrary, there are attempts to restrict remittances from the Tamil diaspora to the LTTE.

As circumstances slowly change, some developments in Indian policy also seem to have become possible. After the IPKF operation of the 1990s, India kept more or less aloof, but now there seems to be a greater readiness to play a part. Also, other international participants would like to see India more actively engaged in the peace process. Significantly, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu has called for joint India-Sri Lanka patrolling in the straits to prevent easy to-and-fro movement of LTTE boats. This can be a very helpful measure that would inhibit renewed battle and encourage the resumption of talks. The proposed defence agreement between India and Sri Lanka would serve the same purpose. More direct intervention in the peace process may not be feasible at present, one inhibiting factor being India's extradition demand for LTTE leader Prabhakaran. There are many who insist on this demand as a matter of principle, even though it may not presently be possible for the Sri Lankan authorities to meet it. It is a reminder of the tangled past that complicates India's present policy. Yet, despite the factors that impose restraint and caution, there are some signs of movement. India seems carefully inching towards assuming a more active role in favour of peace.

(Salman Haidar is a former Foreign Secretary, Government of India.)

India, Lanka to ink defence pact

Joint Working Group To Be Set Up To Tackle Fishermen Issue

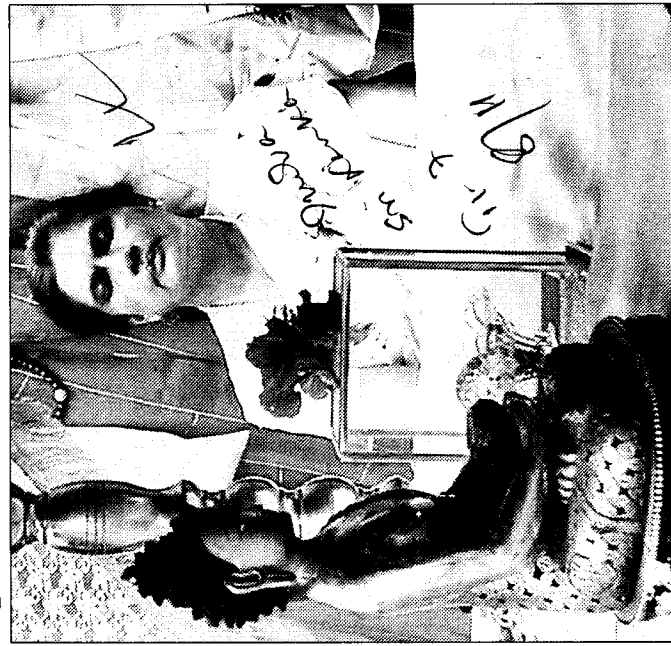
New Delhi: Marking a new dimension in their bilateral relations, India and Sri Lanka on Sunday agreed to sign a defence cooperation agreement and set up a joint working group (JWG) to deal with the issue of fishermen straying into each other's territorial waters.

The two sides decided to finalise a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the rehabilitation of the Palaly airfield in Jaffna peninsula, a joint press release issued at the end of the five-day visit of Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga here said. The Indian side also agreed to carry out the refit of the Sri Lankan naval ship 'Sayura' and underwrite the costs.

While deciding to continue with the existing understanding on the humane treatment and early release of apprehended fishermen, the two nations decided to constitute a JWG, which could meet frequently to deal with issues relating to straying fishermen, working out modalities for prevention of use of force against them and the early release of confiscated boats.

It will also work towards bilateral arrangements for licensed fishing.

On the question of the Sethusamudram canal project, it was agreed that an exchange of views on the economic and environmental aspects in relation to Sri Lanka would be arranged between experts of the



Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga closes her eyes as she worships in the 'Diamond Seat' at the Mahabodi Temple in Bodhgaya, near Patna, on Sunday

two countries.

The two countries will also consider setting up a JWG to keep under review problems arising out of the implementation of the free trade agreement signed by them. They resolved to inject impetus to the process of further economic integration of the two economies by expediting negotiations on the comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA).

Kumaratunga and PM Manmohan Singh agreed that the \$ 100 million credit line offered by India for the development of rural infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka would be used for building rural feeder roads, setting up vocational training institutes, water supply development schemes, community development projects, rural telephony and refurbishing of the road between Anuradhapura and Trincomalee, which is to be named 'Rajiv Gandhi Amity Highway'.

The two sides agreed to explore the possibilities of intensification of cooperation in the power sector; the release said.

Kumaratunga, who left for Bodh Gaya, called on President A P J Abdul Kalam and held meetings with Congress President Sonia Gandhi, defence minister Pranab Mukherjee and external affairs minister K Natwar Singh. She also met former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. **PTI**

SF
5/11
Statesman News Service

Chandrika calls on PM

NEW DELHI, Nov. 4. — The Sri Lankan President, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, on a five-day "working" visit here, met Dr Manmohan Singh, today and considered steps to be taken for launching a ferry service between the two countries besides reviewing bilateral cooperation in defence, economic and other major areas. She also briefed Indian leaders on her government's initiatives to reopen stalled talks with the Tamil Tigers.

Mrs Kumaratunga, on her first visit here since the UPA government assumed office in May, will call on Dr APJ Abdul Kalam on Saturday.



Dr Manmohan Singh and Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga exchange greetings at the PM's residence in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

The Sri Lankan and Indian delegations discussed bilateral cooperation in fisheries, defence, developmental projects, a Line of Credit extended by India to the island nation, a ferry service between the two countries, the Free Trade Agreement and the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement,

the MEA spokesman said.

On the status of the proposed ferry service, he said discussions were on. The service is proposed between Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu and Colombo. They both expressed satisfaction over the "excellent cooperation" between the two countries, the spokesman said.

India
S. Lanka
MFI-1

Play the Colombo card

M/6

NATWAR SINGH'S declaration that the new government will step up defence ties with Sri Lanka marks the maturity and importance of ties between India and its southern neighbour. The relations, as his Sri Lankan counterpart has noted, have reached a point of irreversible excellence. But the countries had overcome a difficult phase in the Eighties when India involved itself in the affairs of the island first in support of Tamil militants, then as an honest broker to resolve the ethnic dispute and finally as a combatant seeking to suppress the LTTE.

India lost some 1,100 jawans in the operations against the LTTE and in 1991, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a gang of LTTE terrorists. The outfit has since been outlawed not just by India, but several other countries in the world, including the US. However, there is considerable support for the Eelam cause, if not the LTTE in Tamil Nadu, particu-

larly the DMK allies of the new coalition government. With hindsight perhaps, the DMK, the LTTE and Colombo now realise that the provisions for Tamil autonomy provided for in the India-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 provided for the most even-handed solution to the problem. So, they now want India to join the peace process that is being brokered by the Norwegian government.

It is understandable that the new government has to walk a fine line. Home Minister Shivraj Patil has made it clear that there will be no change in the status of the LTTE and the term of the multidisciplinary monitoring agency chaired by the CBI to look into the conspiracy angle in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination has been extended by a year. For his part, Mr Singh has wished the peace process well, and hoped that a negotiated solution will be found that would maintain the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka.

THE HINDU 2 JUN 2004

India will step up defence ties with Sri Lanka: Natwar Singh

● 'Alliance partners in Tamil Nadu will be kept informed'

By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, MAY 31. India will take forward defence cooperation with Sri Lanka and the alliance partners from Tamil Nadu in the Congress-led Government will be kept informed of "all these matters, including defence," the External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, said today after talks with his Sri Lankan counterpart, Lakshman Kadirgamar.

Asked whether defence cooperation with Sri Lanka was possible with the DMK being part of the ruling alliance, Mr. Singh said the alliance partners would be fully informed of the discussions he had had. "They naturally have an interest in it. They are next door. But I don't see any difficulty or problem or hurdle in this."

Addressing a joint press conference at South Block with Mr. Kadirgamar, Mr. Singh concurred with the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister that India could play a role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the island nation's war-torn areas, including humanitarian work.

On whether a defence cooperation agreement under discussion would be signed by the two countries, Mr. Singh said that Mr. Kadirgamar would be meeting the Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee, apart from having a separate session between officials. "We will take this forward and fix the dates."

"We've had an hour's extensive discussion on matters of mutual interest, which have covered political, economic, security and trade [issues]. These discussions were, as they should be, held in a frank and free manner. Both countries attach very high importance to their bilateral relations."

"As you know, India is committed to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the unity of Sri Lanka in a federal system and the Prime Minister [Manmohan Singh] has said that we very much hope that a peaceful, negotiated solution will be found which will maintain the unity, territorial integrity and



CLOSE TIES: The External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh, with his Sri Lankan counterpart, Lakshman Kadirgamar, in New Delhi on Monday. — AFP

sovereignty of Sri Lanka and satisfy all sections of the people of Sri Lanka," Mr. Singh said in his opening remarks.

Mr. Kadirgamar, who is the first Foreign Minister to visit the country since the Congress-led Government took power, stated that India-Sri Lanka relations had now reached a point of 'irreversible excellence'. Governments over the years had contributed to this, he said. He also held discussions with the new National Security Adviser, J.N. Dixit, himself a former High

Commissioner to Sri Lanka.

Referring to the "multipartisan approach" to India within Sri Lanka, Mr. Kadirgamar said the two countries would concentrate on further improving economic cooperation, specially the comprehensive economic partnership under discussion.

Looking forward to a new era in bilateral relations, he categorically said that there had been no reference to the "very unfortunate question" of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in his discussions with Mr. Singh.

"Not one word" was spoken on the issue.

Mr. Kadirgamar denied that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam had placed any "condition" when its political wing leader, S.P. Thamilchelvan, said on May 26 that the Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA) for the North-East be institutionalised before talks on core issues could proceed with Colombo.

"I don't think it's correct to say that the LTTE has laid down a condition for the resumption of talks," he said, pointing out that the Tigers, in Colombo's assessment, were keen on resuming the peace talks.

As for the agenda for the talks, discussions were going on. The LTTE's ISGA proposal, submitted to the previous United National Party Government on October 31, 2003, was "on the table". Equally, other views had been expressed.

"Those are going to be matters of discussion. There's no question of take it or leave it at all. These are all matters that are going to be discussed between the parties when they meet. That's all I can say at the moment. We will have to wait and see when the talks resume, how these talks are going to proceed."

In response to a question, Mr. Kadirgamar said that a significant body of opinion in Sri Lanka wanted India to play a suitable role in evolving the peace process and reaching a final solution.

"That body of opinion exists ... it has not reached the point where I can tell you with any precision or definition what this role is going to be. It looks as though the role certainly can be a role in the field of reconstruction, rehabilitation, humanitarian work which the Indian Government has always been interested in, which all Sri Lankan Government have been interested in because we are dealing with the plight of the people of the North and the East who have been buffeted by war for 20 years," he said. The parameters of such a role would have to be discussed further.

Colombo push for Delhi peace role

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 31: Visiting Sri Lankan foreign minister Lakshman Khadirgamar today reiterated his request that Delhi play a "bigger role" in the peace process in Colombo.

During his hour-long meeting with counterpart Natwar Singh, he, however, avoided asking what the new regime's stand was on extraditing Tamil Tiger chief Prabhakaran — accused of masterminding Rajiv Gandhi's assassination — to India.

Khadirgamar spent most of his time briefing Singh on the status of Colombo's peace talks with the Tamil Tigers and how the impasse could be broken. He is the first foreign envoy to come to India for talks since Manmohan Singh took over as Prime Minister.

"In our country there is a very strong body of opinion across the board which wishes to see India play a suitable role in the evolution of our peace process and the reaching of a final settlement," Khadirgamar told journalists this afternoon.

But he conceded "it has not reached a point where I can tell



Singh: Concern for Lanka

you with precision or definition what this role is going to be".

He suggested to Singh that India could start by working on reconstruction, rehabilitation and humanitarian work in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka. But the issue needed "further discussions", he added.

Singh said: "We are naturally concerned and whatever help we can give, we will naturally give."

When the proposal was earlier placed before former foreign minister Yashwant Sinha, Delhi had wanted details on how it could help. South Block officials had asked if the money and material India offered for recon-

struction and rehabilitation would be given to the Tamil Tigers — as they were in control of the northern and eastern areas — or to the government in Colombo.

The composition of Manmohan Singh's United Progressive Alliance government — in which the DMK, MDMK and the PMK, all pro-Tamil Tiger, are partners — would also be a cause for worry for the Lankan government as it could hamper cooperation in many areas, particularly defence.

But Singh seemed confident this would not be a problem. Claiming all discussions, including those on defence cooperation, would be held in a "frank, fruitful and creative" atmosphere, he said: "We will keep our alliance partners fully informed."

On the Tamil Nadu parties, he said: "They have an interest in it. They are next door."

Khadirgamar did not blame the Tamil Tigers for the impasse. "The LTTE is keen to resume talks. When it comes to the agenda of the talks, there is now a discussion going on. It is an ongoing process. The discussion going on is about what is to be discussed."

"Continuity in India-Sri Lanka ties"

By Amit Baruah

30/4 119-16

IT IS his third term as Foreign Minister. Lakshman Kadirgamar, the articulate face of the new Sri Lankan Government, stopped over in New Delhi for talks with the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, on his way back to Colombo after attending an Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) meeting in Shanghai.

Calling for an Indian role in the soon-to-be-resumed peace process, with the consent of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Mr. Kadirgamar told *The Hindu* in an interview that he hoped to be back here after a new Government took over in May.

In Shanghai, Mr. Kadirgamar met with the Chinese Vice-President, Qing Hong, who was accompanied by State Councillor, Tang Jiakuan, the Foreign Minister, Li Zhaoxing, and party politburo member, Qian Qichen.

The Foreign Minister said he would be in Washington on May 12 for a meeting with the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and other members of the Bush Administration.

Excerpts from the interview:

Question: What are the objectives of your current visit to India?

Answer: I went to China in the last two days for the 60th anniversary celebrations of the founding of ESCAP. I was keen to pay a bilateral visit, however short it may be, to India either on my way to China or on my way back from China ...

I know it is campaign time here and the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, was very kind to interrupt his campaigning and come to see me for a few hours. So, it is, I would say, symbolic, and a manifestation of continuity in our relationship with India ...

The best thing that has happened in Sri Lankan politics is the convergence of wishes and intentions on the part of all parties that our relations with India should be maintained at a special level of excellence.

What role do you think India can play at the current juncture of the peace process?

... For some time, many people and parties in Sri Lanka, across the political spectrum, have been saying that India must play some role ...

Playing a role is rather a broad way of expressing this feeling. We now have to begin to talk with India with the consent of the LTTE — that is very important — because without the consent of the LTTE which, after all, is the principal negotiating partner of any Sri Lankan Government that has to address this problem, you

"The best thing that has happened in Sri Lankan politics is the convergence of wishes and intentions on the part of all parties that relations with India should be maintained at a special level of excellence."

can't just bring in third parties like that ...

Even the LTTE has from time to time said that India must have a role. So, the question of what the role should be is a matter for discussion. And, certainly, it has to be a discussion with the LTTE also. There is no question of the [Sri Lankan] Government inviting India unilaterally to play an undefined role.

I think we have reached a point, and my own personal feeling is that the Indian Government, whether it be this Government or any other Government, is receptive to the idea, conceptually, of playing a role.

The reconstruction of the [Sri Lankan] North and the East is becoming the paramount consideration in the conduct of the peace process. By that I do not mean that core issues must be forgotten forever. As you know, our Government has always been very keen that substantive negotiations should take place on the so-called core issues. The LTTE has shown some reluctance to deal with that matter in the same up-front way in which we would like it to be dealt with.

But, the bottom-line ... the basis of agreement without any doubt is that rehabilitation and reconstruction must be addressed ... right up-front.

India could play a role in this?

That is the point at which it would be easiest, least complicated for India to enter the scene. That is the way I visualise it; that is a skeletal thought at the moment. I have a feeling that we can build on that.

The Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Kumaratunga, has already invited the Norwegians to resume their role in the peace process. Have you also had any contacts with the LTTE?

Yes ... the peace process has been stalled for almost a year now ... so, when we start, it will be a cold start. That means the Norwegians have to be contacted again ... because you will recall that shortly after the President took over the Ministry of Defence on November 4, 2003, the Norwegians made a statement to the effect that there was now a lack of clarity in the Governmental structure

in Sri Lanka. They virtually indicated that they were withdrawing, at least, for a while.

I think the Norwegians realised, as the months went by, that that was not a particularly good position to have taken. It seems clear that if an invitation is extended to them to resume a role in the peace process that they would accept it.

Accordingly, the President spoke to the Norwegian Ambassador in Colombo, she spoke to the Norwegian Prime Minister on April 22 and the next step is that the Norwegian Deputy Minister, who has been handling this matter, is coming to Sri Lanka on May 2, and Mr. [Erik] Solheim and others are coming in the middle of May. The Norwegian Foreign Minister is also likely to come.

So, you will see, in the month of May, these various developments going on. We anticipate that the LTTE will, within a few days, perhaps, formally indicate its willingness to resume talking. Since it's a cold start, there will have to be a couple of rounds of discussion about modalities, talks about talks, and the structure of the talks ... because of this long break.

The LTTE has been making it clear that their dominant concern is the interim administration. That, I believe, reflects their view that since rehabilitation and reconstruction is the predominant concern of the people of the North and the East, with which we also agree ... in the absence of some kind of mechanism to handle the disbursement of funds and get these projects going it will not be possible to start any work on the reconstruction side.

There is a convergence of certain ideas and approaches. It is still a little too early, as of today, to say how all this is going to work out. The principal point is that there will be a resumption of contact officially. Back channels have been in operation for some time.

Do you think the Karuna factor (the abortive revolt by the LTTE's one time eastern commander in March) might be an impediment to beginning negotiations with the LTTE?

I think it's a little difficult to say

because the Karuna situation is somewhat confused. I don't think anybody really knows with certainty the importance of this factor. The LTTE has said that Karuna must be found, eliminated ... At the moment, I think the situation is a little fluid. We will have to wait and see how they [the Tigers] perceive this Karuna factor ... whether they perceive this as an enormously difficult problem in the way of resuming talks or whether it's a kind of side issue to be dealt with, but not to be allowed to become an obstacle. These are attitudinal problems that will only be sorted out after they surface.

There is a sizable presence of LTTE-backed candidates in the Sri Lankan Parliament as well as Sinhala hardliners. How do you see that impacting on the politics of Sri Lanka?

This is a very, very interesting and problematic situation for Sri Lanka. The convergence of these forces is taking place for the first time in our long parliamentary history. It is for the first time that a party of monks has emerged formally ... in the last Parliament we had one monk ...

Equally, for the first time, an LTTE-sponsored or an LTTE proxy party, has such a large bloc of [22] seats. That has never happened before ... How the TNA [Tamil National Alliance] is going to use this voting strength from now on is problematic.

The obvious way of looking at it is that they will use it to exercise leverage on the Government of the day and, indeed, on the Opposition in relation to what is to them probably the sole issue that concerns them — the ethnic question. That undoubtedly, in terms of parliamentary politics, introduces a whole new dimension because votes ... can be used in other directions as well — not merely on the ethnic question. It can be used for leverage purposes in the ordinary working life of Parliament.

I would say it's too early to make an assessment ... the fact that they voted with the Opposition ... on the Speakership is not conclusive of the way in which they will handle their block from now on. We will have to see, for instance, what their attitude is going to be after [peace] talks start.

It is a new and complicating factor in our politics that these forces have emerged. One might also mention the JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna). The JVP has done enormously well ... now they have 39 seats ... so there are clear messages coming from there also.

India for resumption of peace process in Sri Lanka

NEW DELHI, APRIL 29. Expressing hope for an early resumption of the peace process in Sri Lanka, India today said that an enduring solution to the vexed issue afflicting the island nation could be found only through the internal political processes.

"The Government expressed the hope for an early resumption of the peace process and for a negotiated settlement acceptable to all sections of Sri Lankan society within the framework of a united Sri Lanka," an External Affairs Ministry spokesman told reporters here. His statement came after the visiting Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, held detailed discussions with the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, and the National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra.

The spokesman said India hoped that the negotiated settlement between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Sri Lankan Government would be "consistent with democracy, pluralism and respect for individual rights."

"India believes that an enduring solution has to emerge purely through internal political processes," he said.



The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, with the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, at South Block in New Delhi on Thursday. — Photo: V. Sudershan

During the discussions, Mr. Sinha and Mr. Kadirgamar also decided to resume discussions on areas of economic partnership, defence cooperation and cooperation in the fisheries sector.

The two sides also reiterated their desire to work closely in international fora and take "co-ordinated positions" on bilateral, regional and global issues of common interest. The spokesman said that Mr. Kadirgamar, during meetings with Mr. Mishra and Mr. Sinha, reiterated Colombo's desire to further strengthen and deepen the already close and cordial relations between the two countries.

"India attaches high priority to its relations with Sri Lanka and is committed to working towards enhancing cooperation in the multi-faceted sectors of bilateral relations," he said.

Mr. Kadirgamar, on his part, conveyed to the Indian leaders that Colombo favoured re-starting of the suspended peace talks with the LTTE within the next two months.

Norwegian interlocutors are expected to arrive in the island nation next month to pick up the threads of the stalled peace process.

The Sri Lankan Minister spoke of efforts by his Government to work out a viable mechanism for the reconstruction of the trouble-torn Jaffna. — PTI

Interview on Page 10

Proposed Indo-Lankan ferry service on hold

Jaya Menon in Colombo

March 26. — The proposed ferry service between Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu and Talaimannar in north Sri Lanka, which could trigger massive human traffic between the two countries, would not be feasible until the completion of the peace process between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, sources in the Indian High Commission said here.

"We (the Indian government) have not said 'no' either to a land bridge project or a ferry service between the two countries," Indian officials here pointed out. But the strident protests by the Tamil Nadu chief minister, Miss Jayalalitha, against a ferry service citing increased militant activities by the LTTE in the region, have effectively put a stop to all work in this area.

The ferry service would "integrate the economies" of India and Sri Lanka and bring about a much-needed resurgence of the Tuticorin port in India by encouraging trade in ilmenite available in abundance in the Jaffna region in Sri Lanka. But, "while there are clear eco-

Trouble for fishermen

COLOMBO, March 26. — The frequent mid-sea encounters between Indian fishermen and the Sri Lankan Navy were triggered by the former poaching in Lankan waters, near the Gulf of Mannar, as close as five km from the Sri Lankan coast and not in Katchateevu waters as it was widely believed, Indian High Commission sources here said, adding: "Katchateevu is only a red herring." — SNS

conomic justifications, a non-alarmist view of the LTTE can only be possible if a peace settlement is reached. Clearly the ferry service is tied to the peace process," officials pointed out. When the ferry service was okayed by the Indian government and all the elaborate necessary clearances were received from the Ministries of External Affairs, Home, Shipping and Defence, the Indian High Commission here was gearing itself to process 800 visas a day.

Then came the protest from the Tamil Nadu chief minister. "Miss Jayalalitha has a genuine case. Our resources, necessary to screen such massive traffic, would have been sorely stretched."

LTTE against India-Lanka defence deal

COLOMBO, Jan. 27. — Taking serious note of the proposed defence cooperation between India and Sri Lanka, Tamil Tiger rebels have said this could tilt the balance of forces in the island nation and damage an already fragile truce between the guerrillas and the government troops.

“A military pact with India would encourage the Sinhala

political leadership to take a hard-line, belligerent attitude towards the (minority) Tamils and eventually destroy the mutual trust between the estranged communities, a crucial factor necessary for the consolidation and promotion of peace,” LTTE’s chief peace negotiator Anton Balasingham was quoted as saying by the pro-rebel TamilNet website.

Church attacked: A Roman Catholic church was torched near here amid increasing attacks against minority Christians in this Buddhist-majority country, police said today. Dozens of men stormed into the “Shrine of the Mother Most Pure” at Mattegoda overnight and escaped after torching the premises, a church member said. — Agencies