

THURSDAY, JUNE 29, 2006

## What Balasingham should understand

**A**s the peace process in Sri Lanka totters on the brink of collapse and the screws of international sanctions tighten on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Anton Balasingham, Political Adviser to the organisation's supremo, has come up with a clever, perhaps over-clever, play. This is in the form of an interview to NDTV – the highlight of which is a so-called confession on the LTTE's role in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperumbudur in May 1991 combining with an appeal to India to be "magnanimous," "put the past behind [it]," and shape "a new foreign policy towards her neighbour" on the basis of "a new understanding ... [and] a new relationship" with the Tigers. This is clearly meant to soften New Delhi's unrelenting hostility, legal and political, towards the LTTE – now proscribed or listed by most major countries as a terrorist organisation – and also to create confusion in the Indian public mind about the organisation's real aims and intentions.

The 'confession,' couched in ambiguity, is classic double-speak. The Rajiv assassination, according to Mr. Balasingham, was "a great tragedy ... a monumental tragedy ... which we deeply regret, and we call upon the Government of India and people of India to be magnanimous ... to put the past behind [them] and to approach the ethnic question in a different perspective." This statement can be read in any which way. It will certainly not qualify in any court of law as a confession since Mr. Balasingham can offer the following defence: "What I meant was that the LTTE regarded the Rajiv Gandhi assassination as a great or monumental tragedy and since India seemed convinced we were behind it, I appealed to it to put the whole tragic experience behind it and approach Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict from a fresh perspective." But the answer to the LTTE spokesman's appeal to India to "actively involve [itself] in the peace process" cannot be in any doubt. Given the circumstances, India cannot play any direct role in Sri Lanka's peace process. At the same time, this country has a deep interest and stake in its neighbour coming out of its time of troubles on the basis of a non-military, negotiated, and just political settlement of the Tamil question along federal lines – and within the framework of Sri Lanka remaining one. It can be added that *The Hindu* has, over the past half century, shared this perspective and consistently championed the cause of the Tamils of the island within this just and anti-secessionist framework. Further, New Delhi has made it abundantly clear that it will "maintain an abiding interest in the security of Sri Lanka and remains committed to its sovereignty and territorial integrity." What Mr. Balasingham needs to understand is that this national policy has solid support across the political spectrum, barring some small pro-LTTE parties and elements in Tamil Nadu that stand isolated from mainstream democratic opinion.

29 JUN 2006

# "An attempt to soften India's attitude" 29/6

## Legal situation unchanged: Kaarthykeyan

Staff Reporter *90/30 S. Sankar 119-12*

**MADURAI:** The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was trying to soften the attitude of the Government and people of India by coming out with a confession and apology in connection with the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the former Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Director, D.R. Kaarthykeyan, said on Wednesday.

Speaking to *The Hindu* over telephone, Mr. Kaarthykeyan, who led the Special Investigation Team (SIT) that probed the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, said the LTTE's chief negotiator Anton Balasingham's statement would not in any way alter the legal situation in the case. The charge sheeted case against the absconding accused was pending before the court.

The fact that India had commuted the death sentence of one of the key accused to life imprisonment and "did nothing for over eight years to implement the death sentence confirmed by the Supreme Court on three other accused" might have made the LTTE think that there was a softening of the Centre's attitude. "I do not think any politician could have played a role in the LTTE coming out with a confession at this stage," he said.

### Not surprised

Mr. Kaarthykeyan said he was not surprised at the 'confession' of the LTTE. "After the miserably failed attempts by some self-seeking politicians in our own country to derail and disrupt the investigation and trial [in the assassination case], admission of guilt by unarguably the deadliest terrorist group in the world gives me immense



D.R. Kaarthykeyan

professional satisfaction."

Accusing the LTTE of "ingratitude" and "short-sightedness", he said it was Rajiv Gandhi who took enormous interest and went out of the way to solve the Sri Lankan ethnic crisis.

The conspiracy to kill Rajiv Gandhi was a decision taken at the highest level [in the LTTE] and was not known even to leaders such as Mathiah. "The LTTE wanted to take revenge for the damage suffered by them due to IPKF operations."

Asked whether the outfit was looking for sympathy, he said it always wanted support from India and other countries. Both the LTTE and Sri Lankan defence forces were overtaken by "battle fatigue" and felt "weakened."

On whether the LTTE's statement coincided with the war situation in Sri Lanka, Mr. Kaarthykeyan said war clouds were hovering over the island nation for over 15 years.

One of the reasons for the sudden confession could be that the "LTTE was convinced that unless India is involved actively now, there cannot be a solution satisfactory to Tamils.

"They might have calculated that admitting a fact which is already universally established and expressing regret could soften India's attitude to some extent."

22 JUN 2006

THE HINDU

# Rajiv assassination "deeply regretted": LTTE

It was a "monumental historical tragedy,"

Anton Balasingham tells NDTV

Diplomatic Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has said that it deeply regretted the May 21, 1991 assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and described it as a "monumental historical tragedy."

Anton Balasingham, LTTE's chief negotiator and ideologue, told NDTV: "As far as that event [Rajiv assassination] is concerned, I would say it is a great tragedy, a monumental historical tragedy for which we deeply regret and we call upon the Gov-

ernment of India and the people of India to be magnanimous to put the past behind and to approach the ethnic question in a different perspective."

Without referring directly to the LTTE's recognised role in Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, Mr. Balasingham went beyond what LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran said at his April 10, 2002 press conference. At the time, Mr. Prabhakaran had said about the assassination: "This is a tragic incident that took place 10 years ago. We don't want to comment further on it."

In Tuesday's comments, Mr.

Balasingham said the LTTE was prepared to build a new understanding with India provided New Delhi made a "positive gesture" towards the Tigers. Mr. Balasingham's remarks come at a time when the European Union has banned the LTTE and the Tigers have themselves undermined Norway's role as facilitator.

Asked whether the LTTE's unhappiness over the 1987 India-Sri Lanka accord led to the Indian leader's assassination, Mr. Balasingham was quoted as saying: "No. It happened later on. What has happened is, since we rejected the Sri Lankan accord there were a lot of events that took place creating a gulf between the LTTE and the Gov-

ernment of India and the Indians later sent the IPKF - Indian Peace Keeping Force, to disarm the LTTE and eventually broke out into an open confrontation. "We fought a guerrilla war against the Indian Army for two years and finally the Sri Lankans. We had a negotiation with Sri Lanka and secured the withdrawal of the Indian troops in the 90s and of course finally it was followed by the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi," he said.

"We were not very happy with the political solution proposed by India because it did not satisfy the political aspirations of our people. If India has offered a federal solution as she has in her own country then we would have

definitely responded positively but the provincial administration suggested by India was totally inadequate to meet the demands of the Tamil people so that's why we did not support the accord," he said.

Asked whether the LTTE could assure India that an event like the Rajiv Gandhi assassination would not happen again, Mr. Balasingham replied: "We have made pledges to the Government of India that under no circumstances we will act against the interest of the Government of India and that ever since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, India played a detached role. What we feel is India should actively involve [itself] in the peace process."

JAYALALITHA SUPPORTS TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTER'S DEMAND FOR CENTRE'S INTERVENTION

# PM, Karunanidhi talk Lanka tangle

Statesman News Service

CHENNAI, June 20: A day after the DMK and its allies met here and sought Centre's intervention in Sri Lanka, New Delhi responded today by sending an emissary to meet the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr M Karunanidhi.

Incidentally, the Opposition leader and AIADMK chief, Miss J Jayalalitha supported the demand that the Centre must intervene in Sri Lanka to bring peace. She

was the latest and the last of the significant political party leader to seek Indian intervention in Sri Lanka.

Mr Karunanidhi had a telephonic conversation with the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, and the two leaders discussed the issue. "The Prime Minister has assured me of appropriate steps to restore peace in Sri Lanka," Mr Karunanidhi said on his conversation with Dr Manmohan Singh.

On Monday, all five electoral allies of the DMK, including the Congress,

met at the DMK office to discuss the Lankan Tamil problem. The Dravidar Kazhagam, a supporter of the DMK led Democratic Progressive Alliance was also present. The meeting passed two resolutions and a copy of it, signed by all the parties, was sent to the Prime Minister. The other parties who were in the discussions were the PMK, CPI, CPI-M and the IUML.

The resolutions passed by them asked the Centre to take steps for return of peace in Sri Lanka. It urged

both the Centre and Sri Lanka to take steps to guarantee the safety and security of fishermen in Tamil Nadu who were "being subjected to torture at the hands of the Lankan Navy".

The resolution pertaining to the call for Indian intervention said: "The expectation that the peace talks in Sri Lanka undertaken with Norway's involvement would resolve the problem amicably and that the Lankan government and the rebels would work on development

plans for the people have been belied. A situation prevails where both sides are ready to clash with each other again. There have been instances of deaths of innocent people in Sri Lanka in mine blast and bombing by planes. As a consequence, Tamils are fleeing into Tamil Nadu as refugees. This has an impact on the minds of the people living in both Sri Lanka and India. The Lankan issue has been the cause of several painful incidents in the past. The government of India must

ponder this deeply and take steps to bring about peace in Sri Lanka."

After the recent spurt in violent clashes between the Lankan military and the LTTE, the state witnessed several protest demonstrations condemning the Lankan government's actions. Centre's intervention has been demanded by various parties including the DPJ and the MDMK, both allies of the opposition AIADMK. The parties have been condemning the silence of the Centre and the State.

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

# Sri Lankan Foreign Minister coming

## India concerned at deteriorating situation in island nation

Diplomatic Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** India will get a first-hand understanding of the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka from the island nation's Foreign Minister Mangala Samaraweera, who is scheduled to arrive here on June 22.

Highly placed government sources said on Tuesday that India was concerned at the situation in Sri Lanka. Government circles were, however, well aware that the problem had to be tackled by Colombo.

Stressing that there was no divergence of opinion between New Delhi and Chennai on the Sri Lanka issue, the sources said an assessment would be conveyed to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi after talks with Mr. Samaraweera.

### "Avoid war"

The Manmohan Singh Government felt the Sri Lankan Government should avoid an all-out war, the sources said.

At all times, Sri Lanka has kept India posted with the latest

developments. Mr. Samaraweera, in fact, was in New Delhi in the second week of May to brief the Government about the latest developments.

### Centre's emissary to meet Karunanidhi

Chennai Special Correspondent writes:

Mr. Karunanidhi said National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan was being sent as the Centre's emissary to discuss the Sri Lankan issue with him.

Mr. Karunanidhi said he

spoke to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh over phone on Tuesday morning to apprise him of the situation in the island nation.

### Resolution

The Prime Minister told him that he had read the resolution of the DMK and its allied parties on the issue.

Dr. Singh further told him that he was sending an emissary to discuss the issues highlighted in the resolution, according to a press note.



M.K. Narayanan

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2/6  
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# India must do its bit for peace in Lanka: DMK

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE**  
CHENNAI, JUNE 19

THE DMK-led Democratic Progressive Alliance, including the Congress, PMK and Left parties, today urged the Centre "to do the needful" to ensure peace in Sri Lanka which is in the grip of growing violence again.

"At a time when everybody believed that the peace process initiated by Norway would lead to successful peace talks and that the Lankan government and the militants would show interest in development work for the people, the expectations have been dashed, and once again both sides are in conflict," a joint resolution passed by the leaders of the DPA constituents said.

Urging the UPA government to take steps to ensure peace in Sri Lanka, the resolution pointed out that there was a spurt in the arrival of refugees into Tamil Nadu, "seriously affecting the lives of people on both sides".

When it was pointed out to him that the resolution urging India to play an active role would go against the "hands off" policy of the UPA government towards the Sri Lankan issue, Chief Minister M Karunanidhi told mediapersons after the DPA meeting this evening, "Let the government adopt whatever measure it thinks appropriate."

Asked if an all-party delegation would call on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh regarding the issue,



Karunanidhi said, "As a first step, the DPA met today and agreed on a joint statement. Along with our demand, his will be sent to the prime minister."

Another resolution urged both India and Sri Lanka to take steps to stop the indiscriminate firing on Indian fish-

**The Lankan Navy's consistent claim is that our fishermen are entering their waters. But, the firing on our fishermen should be stopped**

**M Karunanidhi**  
Tamil Nadu Chief Minister

ermen and "ensure safety of their lives, their fishing rights and their belongings."

A young fisherman from Rameshwaram was injured when the Sri Lankan Navy opened fire at a flotilla of more than 700 fishing boats that set sail from Rameshwaram and surrounding fish-

ing villages about midnight on Sunday. Rameshwaram police said the incident occurred when the Indian fishermen were fishing in Lankan waters near Katchateevu.

"The Lankan Navy's consistent claim is that our fishermen are entering their waters. But, the firing on our fishermen should be stopped," Karunanidhi insisted.

Fleeing Lankan Tamils entering the country through Rameshwaram would be carefully screened to ensure that no militants gained entry in the guise of refugees, he said. Two state ministers who had been delegated the task of studying the conditions in some of the refugee camps in Tamil Nadu had returned with their reports and would be briefing him, he added.

INDIAN EXPRESS

# India not to join Lanka peace meet

P.K. Balachandran  
Colombo, May 15

## Road to Tokyo

INDIA IS unlikely to join the co-chairs of the Tokyo Donors' Conference and become an active participant in the Sri Lankan peace process, highly placed sources in New Delhi told *Hindustan Times*. They denied reports that the Japanese special peace envoy for Sri Lanka, Yasushi Akashi, had requested India to join the co-chairs. All that the Japanese envoy had asked was that India help the co-chairs in a way that it was comfortable with, the sources said.

Akashi had met Indian leaders in New Delhi last week. Prior to his departure for India, he told the media in Colombo that Japan had requested India to join the co-chairs and that the "indications" from New Delhi were "positive."

He even said that at the Tokyo conclave of the co-chairs, to be held later in May, appropriate procedures would be worked out to enable India to participate comfortably. However, sources in New Delhi said that India's policy in regard to the Sri Lankan peace process remained the same, namely, to "exercise influence without involvement."

New Delhi also feels that given president Mahinda Rajapaksa's policy of capping the internationalisation of the ethnic conflict at the existing level, there is no scope for a greater Indian involvement.

Rajapaksa had told Colombo-based *The Sunday Times* on May 14, that the Sri Lankan ethnic problem should not have been internationalised in the first place, and that he would not internationalise the conflict any further.

Rajapaksa's line accords with the Indian view that the ethnic problem in the island would

India's policy to Lankan peace process is to 'exercise influence without involvement'

India believes conflict will have to be resolved domestically and not internationally, through a consensus-building process

New Delhi also feels that in the current situation, there is no scope for a greater Indian involvement.



Japan's peace envoy for Lanka, Yasushi Akashi (left), had asked India to join the co-chairs.

AFF

have to be resolved internally, with a homegrown solution emerging from an internal consensus-building process.

Although India too favours a domestic effort to find a lasting solution, it is not at all uncomfortable with the current level of internationalisation, and is fully supportive of the efforts of the co-chairs and the Norwegian peace facilitators.

In fact, India has told Sri Lanka very clearly, that there is no scope for replacing Norway as the facilitator. Sources said that New Delhi's line in this regard was: "It's either Norway or no foreign facilitation at all."

Meanwhile, the pro-LTTE Tamils have seen Japan's bid to rope in India as a co-chair of the Tokyo conference, as an admission of the co-chairs' failure to register any progress in resolving the ethnic conflict.

16 MAY 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES





# India asks Tamil Tigers to return to peace process

Quoted by S. Anantha  
10-9-87

This message has been sent through Oslo to the militant outfit: Erik Solheim

Amit Baruah

**NEW DELHI:** Norwegian International Development Minister Erik Solheim on Saturday said Oslo had been passing messages from New Delhi to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam saying it should return to the peace process in Sri Lanka.

He was replying to a question what New Delhi could do in Sri Lanka given that it had a policy of no-contact with the LTTE, a banned organisation in India.

Asked about India's role, Mr. Solheim, who was here to meet National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan and Joint Secretary Mohan Kumar, told presspersons that he could not give any "public advice" on what New Delhi should do.

- India welcome to join co-chair session
- No military solution to Sri Lankan problem
- Both sides not fulfilling commitments

About the forthcoming meeting of the four co-chairs on Sri Lanka in Tokyo, he said India was welcome to participate in any capacity in the session. Other than Norway, the European Union, Japan and the United States comprise the co-chairs.

Mr. Solheim said the island nation was on the brink of a "very negative" development. But there could be no

military solution to the Sri Lankan problem.

While the LTTE should stop its claymore mine attacks, Colombo should end violence by Tamil paramilitaries, a reference to the breakaway Karuna group. It should also end violence against Tamil civilians, the special envoy said.

### Situation 'very serious'

Describing the situation as "very serious", Mr. Solheim said both the LTTE and the Government should take a step back to the peace process. Both parties, he said, equating the Tiger with the Government, were not fulfilling their commitments.

Asked whether he met LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran during his recent visit to Sri Lanka, Mr. Solheim

said no active step was taken to set up a meeting. LTTE chief negotiator Anton Balasingham was also not available.

On the European Union's decision to ban the Tigers — the LTTE said it was taken at the behest of the Sri Lankan Government — Norway would not comment on the issue. However, he hoped that a formal ban, still to be announced, would not impeding the ceasefire.

Norway did not have a position on the LTTE's claim to operate in Sri Lankan waters, a point made forcefully in recent days by Tiger spokesmen. According to Mr. Solheim, the issue was not clarified at the time Colombo and the LTTE agreed to the ceasefire.

# New Delhi denies remarks made by Erik Solheim

*Handwritten:* Sri Lanka news, #D 13 3475-2

## He claimed India conveyed messages to the Tigers

Diplomatic Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** India on Monday denied comments made by Norwegian International Development Minister Erik Solheim on Saturday that New Delhi had passed on messages to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) through Oslo.

"As you know, for several years we have been sharing our assessment with the Norwegians on developments in Sri Lanka and the peace process. This does not amount to sending any message to the LTTE or any other party," the External Affairs Ministry spokesman told this correspondent.

Earlier, at his regular press briefing, the spokesman was asked a specific question on how New Delhi could be passing messages to the Tigers when the LTTE remained a banned organisation in India. (India renewed the ban on the LTTE for a

• India had renewed ban on LTTE on May 4

• Representative of Indian Embassy to be briefed in Tokyo

• India wants negotiated settlement to ethnic crisis

two-year period on May 4).

He said a representative of the Indian Embassy in Japan would receive a briefing on the May 30 meeting of the four co-chairs on Sri Lanka - Norway, the European Union, Japan and the United States - in Tokyo.

### Efforts for dialogue

Referring to the recent visit of Mr. Erik Solheim to New Delhi, the spokesman said Norway was continuing its efforts to resume the dialogue process in Sri Lan-

ka. Indian officials conveyed to Mr. Solheim that India wanted a peaceful, negotiated settlement to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka, one which safeguarded the unity and sovereignty of the country.

### Goodwill gesture

In a separate development, the spokesman said that 59 Pakistani fishermen were released through the Attari-Wagah border on Monday.

On Tuesday, 71 Indian fishermen are to be released by the Pakistan side through the same route.

According to him, New Delhi hoped that Pakistan would also release another 242 fishermen who had been confirmed as Indian nationals.

Apart from these persons, India hoped that it would be quickly be able to establish the nationality of another 192 fishermen in Pakistani custody.

30 MAY 2006

THE HIND

# India's options in Lanka limited

**NILOVA Roy Chaudhury**

New Delhi, April 27

UNLIKE NEPAL, India's scope for action in Sri Lanka is severely limited by the fact that the government has no dealings with a party in the conflict, the LTTE.

The cabinet committee on security (CCS) met on Thursday to discuss the options, amid the rising clamour for India to act, but these are clearly, sources said, limited, and several options that India cannot take.

It cannot militarily intervene in Sri Lanka by sending in troops, nor can it sell "offensive weapons" to the Sri Lankan army, one of the reasons it opted against signing a defence cooperation agreement with the island na-

tion, as the Tamil minority should not be seen at a disadvantage. India's cooperation with the Lankan armed forces is restricted to training of personnel.

It also cannot actively mediate as a peacemaker without accepting conditions from the LTTE, which is a banned organisation in this country. Given the political compulsions and sensitivities ahead of polls in Tamil Nadu, New Delhi finds its hands largely tied.

What it can do is step up patrolling of the waterways to curb the passage of armaments and supplies to the LTTE. And urge the government in Colombo to maintain the maximum restraint to try and keep the cease-fire functional.

Patrolling along the Tamil

Nadu coast has already been intensified, and emotions in Tamil Nadu will remain controlled if refugees do not arrive in droves. No refugees had arrived since the attack on army headquarters.

India has watched with increasing concern as the cease-fire agreement between Sri Lanka and the LTTE has come under "severe strain since the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse assumed office". Ever since Rajapakse came to power, at least 130 armed forces personnel in Sri Lanka have been killed, most of them victims of the LTTE's trademark claymore mines. But Colombo has been "restrained" in its responses, striking back only after the attack on

army chief Sharath Fonseka.

## Mine attacks threaten truce

SRI LANKA stopped bombing Tamil Tiger targets and reopened borders with rebel territory on Thursday but mine attacks killed two navy sailors and wounded two commandos in northern Sri Lanka. The latest surge in violence is posing as the biggest threat to the country's 4-year-old cease-fire. Meanwhile, police found five headless corpses near the capital, Colombo, and said they were investigating whether the deaths were linked to the recent upsurge in fighting with Tamil rebels.

This week's bloodshed, including two days of government airstrikes against rebel positions, threatens to wreck a 2002 truce that ended two decades of fighting. Both sides in the conflict and the European team overseeing the agreement say the truce holds. But analysts predict that more violence could lead to its total collapse.

AP, Colombo

28 APR 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

# LTTE attack jeopardises ceasefire: CPI (M)

Party wants New Delhi to send tough message to LTTE

Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Thursday asked the Government of India to send out a clear message that the activities of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam would not be tolerated as it would have repercussions within India.

Terming the attack on the Sri Lankan Army Chief by a suicide bomber as a "grave provocation that jeopardises the ceasefire and possibilities of a resumption of the peace process," the party

Polit Bureau said the LTTE's claim that it was committed to the ceasefire would have no credibility if it pursues such vicious assassination tactics.

It said the LTTE withdrew from participation in the second round of talks scheduled this month in Switzerland and that at the ground level, attacks on Tamils in Trincomalee have taken place while the Sri Lankan Army and Navy have lost more than 500 soldiers in the last five months.

It said Norway and all the

countries concerned who were backing the peace initiative should take a firm stand against the provocations by the LTTE. "The Indian Government must also send out a clear message that such activities will not be tolerated as it will have adverse repercussions within India."

The Sri Lankan Government must deal with the situation with restraint and patience so that the overriding interest of maintaining the ceasefire and pursuing the peace process did not get further complicated.

*9/2/76  
S. Karunan  
HD-12  
28/9*

28 APR 2006

THE HINDU

# India watches from distance

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 26: India is in touch with Norwegian peace negotiators to preserve the ceasefire between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers.

Delhi is still wary of a direct intervention in Lankan affairs and, for the moment, is willing to back the Norwegian efforts in bringing peace on the island.

However, there is an urgency to react as there are strong indications of a war breaking out. According to an assessment by the Indian military, the attempted assassination of the Sri Lankan army chief and the retaliatory strikes by the military have cast a thick cloud on the ceasefire agreement between Colombo and the LTTE. If the attacks and the counterstrikes continue, the truce could be sunk without any formal announcement from either side.

Delhi has advised restraint and is urging both sides to abide by the ceasefire agreement. It has expressed concern over the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission's statement yesterday after the attack on Army Commander Sarath Fonseka. "It is likely to have negative effects on the relationship between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, and could jeopardise any possibility of fu-

ture talks," it had said.

Information monitored in Delhi also suggests that the Lankan army has closed borders with LTTE-controlled regions in the eastern part of the island nation. A senior army officer said: "No self-respecting military will take an attack on its chief lying down and the retaliatory strikes were to be expected."

Fonseka is one of the many senior officers of the Lankan army with whom the Indian military enjoys a good rapport. He had completed the Battalion Support Weapons Course, a standard with infantry officers. He has also done a course Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School, Vairangte, Mizoram, besides the commando officers' course in Belgaum, Karnataka.



A Lankan soldier on guard in Colombo. (AFP)

2 2 APR 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

# India must extend reasonable comfort level to sort out Free Trade Agreement issues, says Sri Lanka

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*India*  
*S. Lanka*  
*RD 13*

Sri Lankan Commerce Minister calls for confidence building exercise for enlargement of FTA

Staff Reporter

**CHENNAI:** The widely accepted norm in international relations that stronger economies must extend a reasonable comfort level to relatively small economies should form the basis for sorting out issues in the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement.

This was the message that Sri Lankan Minister for Commerce, Trade and Consumer Affairs Jeyaraj Fernandopulle sought to drive home at a conference organised here on Friday by the Southern India Chamber of Commerce and Industry on "Enlargement of India-Sri Lanka FTA."

Calling for a confidence building exercise towards enlargement of the FTA, he said in doing so policymakers and stakeholders in the private sector must take note of the ground realities. They must recognise the vast asymmetries prevalent in the two countries.

Referring to the "widely accepted" norm, he said many issues relating to implementation of the FTA, however, remained. They were a constraint in the proposed comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA), he said.

Some of the issues were real,

it of India, New Delhi.



Sri Lankan Commerce Minister Jeyaraj Fernandopulle (second from left) at a meeting on India-Sri Lanka FTA in Chennai on Friday. Others from right are Nirupama Rao, Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, S. Ramanathan, president of SICC and Shashi Sareen, director, Export Inspection Council. - PHOTO: VINO JOHN

while others were "perceptions imposing restrictions on exports and trade."

"At the same time, the quotas granted to Sri Lanka on tea and apparel remain almost unutilised for a number of reasons," said Mr. Fernandopulle.

• Many issues remained unresolved

• We are not a threat but a business partner

Nevertheless, the FTA had played a key role in reshaping the bilateral trade and Sri Lanka was firmly committed to its enlargement and for concluding the CEPA expeditiously.

Noting that the two countries reaffirmed their commitment during the visit of Sri Lankan President to India recently, he said technical level negotiations for the CEPA were at an advanced stage.

### Negotiations next month

The next round of negotiations is scheduled to be held in Colombo next month. Urging the Indian entrepreneurs to not look at Sri Lanka as a threat, but as a strategic business partner, he said given the size of its economy and industrial capabilities, Sri Lanka was not in a position to cause serious injury to any industrial sector in India.

India's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Nirupama Rao said the CEPA would further unleash the inherent synergies between the

two countries and bilateral investments were expected to witness a quantum jump.

Listing major Indian investments in Sri Lanka, including the proposed foray of National Thermal Power Corporation and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation, she said there were a few areas of concern. One is the pending subsidy of Lanka IOC, which had mounted to \$74 million.

### Subsidy payment

While appreciating the efforts taken by the Government to resolve it, she said the profitability of the company and its proposed investments in Sri Lanka hinged on the subsidy payment.

Shashi Sareen, director, Export Inspection Council under the Union Ministry of Commerce, said the two countries were working on a framework agreement promising to accord mutual acceptance of certificates.

Chamber president S. Ramanathan called for closer working relationship between various governmental organisations.

SAARC chamber president Macky Hashim said Sri Lanka, which also had a FTA with Pakistan, was planning to sign another with Bangladesh.

MONDAY, JANUARY 2, 2006

Quizz  
Sri Lanka  
LTTE is an  
anti-India force  
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**S**ri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse's visit to India has reaffirmed the cordial relations and natural bonds between close neighbours. The visit came at a difficult time for Colombo. The ceasefire between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has never looked more threatened. The LTTE has all but launched a war against Sri Lankan forces in the North-East. Thus far the Sri Lankan Government has shown commendable restraint. In this war-like atmosphere, the Indian offer of assistance for government reconstruction and development projects in the troubled North-East is important. Of particular significance are bilateral efforts to identify joint ventures for the development of the eastern Sri Lankan port city of Trincomalee, and its surrounding region, and the agreement for a joint venture power plant in the same district. These projects will intensify India-Sri Lanka economic co-operation in a region the LTTE covets. New Delhi did not take up President Rajapakse's invitation to join Norway, Japan, the European Union, and the United States as co-chair of the peace process between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE. But it has made clear its willingness to involve itself in the development of the North-East without a formal role in the peace process.

With this, India has forcefully made the point that it considers the North-East to be an integral part of Sri Lanka. At the same time, New Delhi appears to have successfully conveyed to the visiting President the futility of trying to preserve the unitary character of Sri Lanka in the search for a political solution of the conflict. The joint declaration states that President Rajapakse's approach to the peace process is "to achieve maximum devolution which preserves the unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka." This nuanced formulation, which seems to indicate some flexibility and openness, could be one of the most positive outcomes of the visit. Can Mr. Rajapakse convince his allies — the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna and the Buddhist monks — that harping on a unitary state will be short-sighted? Among other things, such a stance will play into the hands of the LTTE, which wants neither a unitary nor a federal state of Sri Lanka but is hell-bent on achieving 'Tamil Eelam.' Surprisingly, the joint statement is foggy about why the ceasefire is threatened. Instead of identifying the LTTE as the author of the escalating violence, it points to "the need for the strict observance of the ceasefire and immediate resumption of talks aimed at strengthening the ceasefire." Is the non-condemnation of the LTTE deliberate — a consequence of pro-Eelam parties in Tamil Nadu, two of which are constituents of the United Progressive Alliance, applying pressure by ratcheting up the noise against the Rajapakse Government? New Delhi must not forget what Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalithaa has been unwaveringly clear about since May 21, 1991: the LTTE is a virulently anti-India force and no quarter should be yielded to it or to its chauvinist supporters in this country.

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