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President yields to election pressure

AFTER A MONTH of mounting political opposition and violent confrontation in the north and the south, Sri Lanka's President J. R. Jayewardene agreed in principle to dissolve Parliament and hold both general and presidential elections under a caretaker administration if the Sinhalese extremist Peoples Liberation Front (JVP) ceased their campaign of violence in the south.

The President was replying to proposals put forward by Sri Lanka's leading Buddhist clergy in a letter of 20 October. He faced similar and more insistent demands in a gruelling series of discussions during late October with seven of the eight opposition-party alliance to resolve the deepening political crisis.

At the third session of talks on 30 October, opposition leaders in turn told Mr Jayewardene that until his 11-year administration ended and a caretaker government was installed, the JVP - the silent partners in this discussion and the opposition's wild card - would continue their armed insurgency.

The point was brought home to the President - who agreed to place the proposals before his cabinet on 1 November - by a JVP attack that same day on a Sri Lankan Army base 30 miles north of Colombo at Pannala, killing four soldiers and a civilian driver. The attackers escaped with 450 rifles and large quantities of ammunition and explosives.

Jayewardene will dissolve Parliament if JVP give up the gun

Colombo was already in the grip of a mass demonstration as 100,000 people marched through the city on 31 October demanding the government's resignation during a funeral procession for three JVP-inspired students allegedly tortured and killed in Ratnapura recently by Susantha Punchinilame, son of the Chief Minister of Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council.

The south has been in flames since the JVP *hartal* (general strike) called for 10 October touched off a series of bombings and killings throughout Kandy, Uva, Galle, Matara and Hambantota. Helicopter gunships fired on demonstrators attacking police stations at Gandara and Hakmana, and schools were closed indefinitely as curfew-controlled zones were installed. A government call for a one-week truce on 20 October went unheeded as bomb attacks on a United National Party (UNP) committee meeting in Colombo on 24 October killed seven and injured 70.

In the north, militants of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are said to have used September's ten-day ceasefire to regroup and re-

provision. In a gruesome massacre at Medawachchiya near Anuradhapura on 9 October, 44 Sinhalese villagers were hacked to death allegedly by an LTTE unit. Over 30 Indian soldiers are believed killed in a series of LTTE attacks on Vavuniya and Jaffna in late October.

LTTE leader *Kittu*, who was flown into Jaffna with over 150 LTTE exiles after a protest fast in a Madras prison, was released at Jaffna General Hospital on 12 October in the presence of Citizens Committee members. *Kari Kalan*, *Kittu's* successor as LTTE commander Jaffna, was shot dead on 16 October by Indian troops.

Representatives of the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF), Tamil groups who support the Peace Accord and work closely with the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), were returned unopposed to Provincial Councils (PC) for Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya. Hunting parties of EPRLF and ENDLF are said to have accounted for over 22 LTTE supporters in the Jaffna area, since PC nominations closed on 10 October, including 60-year old Sivagnanasundaram, LTTE nominee for the interim administration proposed last year.

Whichever way the President turns and whatever his plans for electoral participation, it seems that the gun will not go away.

Citizenship crisis solved for Plantation Tamils

New measures to resolve the plight of almost a quarter of a million Plantation Tamils rendered stateless by the Sri Lankan government over 40 years ago were announced in mid-October.

The Government proposes to introduce a Bill granting citizenship to all stateless persons of Indian origin born in Sri Lanka before 1 January 1964. Half of the 464,000 Indian Tamils made stateless in 1948 were given citizenship under the Srimavo-Shastri Pact of 1964 and a further 97,000 promised nationality in 1987 - but only after year-long trade union demonstrations and non-violent protests, say upcountry Tamil leaders.

Plantation Tamils, the descendants of south Indian labour migrants to Sri Lankan tea estates, say the Bill will not purge the citizenship issue of all its contradictions. Although children whose parents opted for Indian citizenship in 1949 were bound previously to that decision, in other cases, many of the Citizenship Certificates granted to parents under the 1949 Act do not include the children. The continued requirement of the parents' birth certificates under the proposed Act will also create difficulties and long delay for many families.

Some refugees of Indian origin who fled to Tamil Nadu in 1983 are refusing to return to Sri Lanka. Ceylon Workers Congress leader Mr S Thondaman believes the problem could be solved at a stroke by allowing Indian citizenship to those unwilling to return, while likewise securing Sri Lankan citizenship for all Plantation Tamils who wish to remain in the island

whatever their parents' declarations or status. Human rights Mr. Thondaman believes must triumph over such a dubious history of stop-gap solutions.

Upcountry, the Plantation Tamil vote may play a decisive role in the Presidential elections of 19 December - especially in Nuwara Eliya District where it constitutes almost 50% of the electorate. In other areas, where the Sinhalese vote may be split between two such openly populist candidates as Mr Premadasa and Mrs Bandaranaike Plantation Tamils may hold the balance of power.

Mr Thondaman, Rural Industrial Development Minister in the present UNP government and chief Plantation Tamils' spokesperson, has already promised at an emotional election campaign rally at Kandy on 17 October that one million plantation workers would turn out for the UNP's Mr Premadasa, but in Kandy and other northern upcountry areas where the JVP and Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) vie for supremacy, the outcome is far from certain.

A silent protest of Sinhalese monks and students in Kandy on 10 October propelled a JVP-inspired *hartal* into violent confrontation. Upcountry train services were suspended on 14 October after Kadugannawa Railway Station was fire-bombed and attacked by JVP insurgents.

Despite Mr Thondaman's careful championing of their cause, it seems unlikely however that Sri Lanka's 233,000 newest citizens will appear on the electoral register in time to express their preference for President.

India doubles credit

India has agreed to double Sri Lanka's credit line to Rs500 million for the forthcoming year. The previous allowance, managed by the State Bank of India, ended on 30 September and has already been utilised through firm commitments with Indian exporters.

Candidate killing

In the first reported case from the North-East, Mr. G. Thilaiampalam, UNP candidate for Batticaloa District in the proposed Provincial Council (PC) elections was shot dead by Tamil militants at Kaluthavalai on 12 October, IPKF sources say. Over 30 PC candidates have been killed in different parts of the country since April.

Call-up

Inspector General of Police, Ernest Perera announced on 16 October that over 6,000 of Sri Lanka's 10,000 Reserve Police force would be absorbed into regular Police units over the next few days. Special Task Force units in the Batticaloa area are also to be strengthened shortly.

Emergency

Moving a motion for the continuation of the State of Emergency on 20 October, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vincent Perera said that 247 people were killed in Sri Lanka from 16 September to 14 October of this year. Some 75 political killings, 35 civilian deaths, those of 5 security personnel and 132 "other murders" had taken place during the period, the minister told Parliament during a heated debate.

Opposition and schism in the east over elections merger

Batticaloa plays the waiting game

THE FORTHCOMING Provincial Council elections on 19 November will constitute a new dilemma for many of the Tamil population of Batticaloa in the face of the boycott called by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in early October.

Some observers believe as many as 50% of the Tamil population - a high ratio under the circumstances - will participate rather than remain unrepresented in a three-cornered struggle, already entrenched in communal concerns, between the Sinhalese-backed United National Party, the Muslim Congress and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF). They say that it will be a vote not so much for the erstwhile militants of the EPRLF but to maintain a foothold of representation in the precarious political balancing act preceding the Presidential elections.

Kattankudy Muslim Congress leader S M Ismail however has resigned his post saying the present unrest is not conducive to holding elections. Other sources say threats have forced him to stand down.

Attacks on LTTE personnel by militant groups such as EPRLF, "Three Stars" and the Tamil Eelam Liberation

Organisation (TELO) have risen dramatically in the last few weeks increasing uncertainty and anxiety in the local population. Over 20 LTTE members are said to have been shot dead. Apparently random killings continue as old scores are settled.

The LTTE however have been able to maintain hit-and-run operations against the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) despite the set-backs. LTTE units attacked Indian soldiers at Irudayapuram within Batticaloa city limits in late September, killing three IPKF soldiers and injuring several others. In a landmine attack on Mandur on 15 October by the LTTE seven IPKF soldiers were reported killed. Following bombing raids by Indian Air Force jets on jungle areas between Vaharai and Verugal north of Batticaloa the same day, Indian army sources announced the destruction of an LTTE base at Vaharai. The IPKF held Thanmunnai and the surrounding area under a three-day curfew after an LTTE attack on 24 October which wounded two soldiers.

Francis, the leader of the LTTE's political wing in Batticaloa, and a major spokesman for the Tigers in recent months, was shot dead by the IPKF on 30 October local sources say.

□ **TRINCOMALEE:** Tamil students in Trincomalee staged a demonstration on 18 October against the continuing arrest and harassment of Tamil youths by IPKF forces in the area. Shops, banks and government offices remained closed and public transport came to a standstill.

Following an LTTE attack on 19 October which killed four Tamil civilians in the Muttur area, LTTE leader *Ramesh* was allegedly beaten to death on 30 October by an EPRLF faction supporting IPKF troops in the area.

Amparai unrest

THE MERGER of the Northern and Eastern Provinces and the proposed PC elections in November provoked widespread protest and confrontation in Amparai District earlier this month. Police opened fire on a 10,000-strong crowd outside Ampara Town Hall on 10 October, injuring 13 people, after two police vehicles were attacked. Local observers say it was the culmination of a series of demonstrations by Sinhalese in the District against the reforms - both long-delayed provisions of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. Candidates from the ruling United National Party, the Muslim Congress and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) will contest the 14 PC seats in the District.

Speaking at a Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) campaign meeting in Kalmunai in mid-October, SLFP Muslim Front organiser A M Samsudeen said that over 150,000 Muslims in the eastern coastal towns from Muttur to Akkaraipattu had become refugees in their own country. The Peace Accord had made paupers of the Muslim community Mr. Samsudeen said and had offered them nothing in return.

Delays in the issue of national Identity Cards to several thousand inhabitants of Amparai have increased tension throughout the area. Farmers and labourers who have to walk several miles to their workplace have alleged continued harassment by security personnel over their lack of documentation.

EUROPE

Refugee agencies oppose involuntary returns

CONCERN has been growing in the last few weeks over Britain's current policy towards Tamil asylum-seekers. Over 50 Sri Lankan Tamils refused asylum in Britain have been returned to Sri Lanka since the beginning of the year, Immigration officials told the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service (UKIAS) in early October. The British Refugee Council (BRC) remains strongly opposed to the return of Tamils directly to Colombo from the UK. BRC's Chairman Lord Chitnis wrote to Home Secretary Douglas Hurd on 11 October asking for a review of the current policy and that no other Tamils should be returned against their will.

His letter refers to the conclusions of a meeting in Geneva in early October of European refugee agencies who make up the European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). The meeting, considering a report of a recent fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka by BRC and the Danish Refugee Council, drew attention to the risks that asylum-seekers returning to Colombo may face, in some cases without identity documents or adequate means of support. The report says many are unable or unwilling to return to their home villages fearing that they may be caught up in the protracted struggle between Tamil militants and the Indian Peace Keeping Force.

ECRE agencies have called on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to remind European governments that both India and UNHCR agree that Sri Lanka Tamils from India must not be returned to Sri Lanka against their will - and

that Tamils from Europe should not be returned involuntarily whatever their present status.

India and UNHCR are planning to suspend the present returns programme from Tamil Nadu for three months because of the coming monsoon season and uncertainty engendered by the proposed Provincial Council and Presidential elections. Some 340 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees arrived in Kankesanthurai, Jaffna from Tamil Nadu on 18 October according to an All Indian Radio broadcast. They are said to be the last of those who fled to Tamil Nadu from the Jaffna area.

As far as is known, Britain remains the only European country returning Tamils to Sri Lanka against their will. Germany and Switzerland, after initial overtures to introduce voluntary repatriation in early July, have ruled out forcible returns following Swiss Delegate for Refugees, Peter Arbenz's visit to Sri Lanka. Since June there have been no deportations from France and almost 50% of Tamils seeking asylum have been given full refugee status.

Tamil refugees in Britain are dismayed by the UK's present policy and disturbed by reports that asylum-seekers on temporary admission, who have been called for interview by immigration officials, have been removed directly to Harmondsworth Detention Centre for expulsion without essential identity documents and personal belongings. Tamil refugee organisations say they are preparing a document on the dangers of involuntary return and the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka.

The SRI LANKA MONITOR is part of an information processing service set up by the British Refugee Council to keep Sri Lankan refugees in Britain, Europe and elsewhere, informed about the current situation in their home areas.

If you have any information you wish to share, or any enquiries you wish to make regarding developments in Sri Lanka, contact:

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Student reprieve

SRI LANKAN Tamil refugees seeking admission to universities and colleges in Tamil Nadu will be able to sit a special entrance exam next month after a campaign mounted by Janata Dal MP Subramaniam Swamy.

A Government Order, discontinuing refugee children's school and university education from July was postponed for a year after widespread protests from refugee and community organisations in India and Sri Lanka. Many refugee students however were not permitted to join colleges by the Tamil Nadu State's Commissioner of Education under the pretext that courses had already started.

MP Swamy announced at a Press Conference in Madras on 15 October his intention to fast indefinitely from 26 October until a Central Government directive of 8 August admitting the students to colleges was implemented. State Governor P. C. Alexander informed Swamy by telephone on 17 October that a special admissions procedure for 200 students seeking entrance to medical and engineering colleges was in preparation.