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Premadasa wants Indian troops out by July

PRESIDENT Ranasinghe Premadasa confounded his critics in late May by formally requesting the Indian government to withdraw its forces from Sri Lanka before the second anniversary of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord on 29 July.

The move came following the first round of talks between the Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who are fighting for a separate state in the North and East. In what was widely regarded as a public relations triumph for the LTTE, Tiger leaders *Yogi, Paramamoorthy* and *Panchatcharam Lawrence* were airlifted to Colombo in early May from a Vavuniya jungle clearing, accompanied by LTTE intermediary Dr Anton Balasingham and Sri Lankan journalists.

Militants clash in Mannar

IN AN ATTACK on a military base belonging to the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) at Mullikaikulam in Mannar District on 20 May, LTTE militants killed 42 PLOTE members and captured large quantities of arms and ammunition. The clash, which also killed 11 Tigers, continued over several days as LTTE cadres mounted house-to-house searches in surrounding villages. The IPKF threw a massive cordon around the area without visible success.

Rumours had been circulating for several weeks that PLOTE forces were regrouping in areas of Mannar and Vavuniya Districts where they have strong support. The LTTE described the attack as "a disciplinary action" and accused PLOTE cadres of extortion, highway robbery and the murder of civilians. A further 11 PLOTE irregulars were killed at Pesalai a few days later sending many of the group's supporters into hiding.

President's request reveals progress in LTTE talks

News of progress of the talks has been carefully managed by an agreed series of communiques issued by both sides usually covering no more than the topics discussed. India was to protest however over a press release in mid-May, indicating discussions on alleged IPKF human rights violations in the North and East. A lightning visit to Colombo by Indian Foreign Secretary S K Singh in early May had obviously not produced the desired effect.

The crucial barter that the talks will broach is said to be devolution in return for disarmament. Analysts say the LTTE will propose a formula based on the Canadian Meech Lake Accord which recognised French-speaking Quebec as a distinct society

requiring fiscal and administrative autonomy.

The fate of Sinhalese and Muslim enclaves in the North and East remains problematic. Mr Premadasa is believed to favour a radical re-drawing of provincial boundaries in the East to carve out a separate province but its patchwork demography offers no obvious solutions.

Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ranjan Wijeratne speaking to the BBC on 1 June was confident however that the LTTE would be persuaded to disarm and re-enter the democratic process. Informed opinion is now convinced that President Premadasa has struck a still-secret deal with the Tigers before going public with his "Indians go home" statement. Whether India will accede to Mr Premadasa's timetable is another matter.

Observers say what is more likely is a conspicuous but gradual withdrawal of IPKF troops by November allowing Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to fashion a more visibly mutual *detente* before national elections in India late this year.

President Premadasa has already intimated that he would not want to host the SAARC summit meeting due to be held in Colombo in November while foreign troops were still on Sri Lankan soil.

Any deal struck on devolution must involve fresh Provincial Council elections in the North and East, if the Tigers are to leap-frog over the Indian-backed Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and analysts say that there will inevitably be a reckoning among the Tamil groups that may not be confined to the ballot box.

NGOs question UN Sri Lanka programme page 2

Tamil/Muslim killings continue in the East .. page 3

REFUGEES

Agencies voice concern over UN's Sri Lanka policy

EUROPEAN voluntary agencies meeting in Geneva in early May, voiced growing concern over international refugee agency UNHCR's public information policy on Sri Lanka. The meeting, one of a series of regular consultations on refugee protection, was told by Mr R Sampathkumar of UNHCR's Asia Bureau that the security situation in Sri Lanka continued to improve and that rehabilitation assistance to returning refugees was an important stabilising factor.

Representatives of a number of agencies including Quakers United Nations Organisation, the World Alliance of YMCAs and the Dutch Refugee Council said that UNHCR's view of the situation was potentially misleading and would send the wrong kind of signals to governments anxious to timetable the return of some 80,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees spread throughout Europe.

A recent issue of UNHCR's flagship monthly publication *Refugees* also drew adverse comment both inside and outside the meeting for its unilaterally positive portrayal of the current situation in northern Sri Lanka and UNHCR's operations.

UNHCR, through its Special Programme of Limited Assistance in Sri Lanka, returned 25,000 Tamil refugees resident in South India to the North and East of the island last year. In the last six months it has concentrated on developing assistance programmes for housing and

unemployment.

Tamil refugee organisations in Europe have consistently opposed the return programme as premature. They cite the continuing conflict between the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) and Tamil militants, which has claimed 5,000 lives since the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord in July 1987. They regard India's role as both the nation returning refugees and one of the parties to the military conflict as unacceptable by international humanitarian standards.

A few days before the Geneva meeting, the London-based Tamil Refugee Action Group (TRAG) released a report on the UNHCR programme entitled *Journey into peril*, alleging UNHCR had relegated its role in the protection of refugees in the face of Indian government interests.

The release of a new Amnesty International report on Sri Lanka this month and a second report by the Jaffna-based University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR), cataloguing torture and extra-judicial killings by both the IPKF and Tamil militant groups, has increased concern over premature optimism for peace in the Tamil-speaking areas of Sri Lanka.

A further concern will be the fate of some 100,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in south India who live outside the camps. They may yet become an important bargaining chip in India's own design for the IPKF's departure.

Refugee plea

A delegation from 23 refugee families returned to Sri Lanka on the UNHCR programme on 28 March have appealed for assistance, following five weeks in a Mannar transit camp. After being returned to Colombo in early May at the insistence of the authorities, they were forced to take refuge in a Hindu temple, they told the press, through lack of housing assistance.

IPKF reprisal

Following a LTTE ambush at Nedunkerni near Vavuniya which killed 18 IPKF soldiers on 13 May, the village was sealed off and shelled by Indian forces. Nine civilians were killed and 22 houses destroyed. Hundreds of people fled the area after a three-day curfew was lifted.

Rehabilitation appeal

J Jebamalai of the Eastern Rehabilitation Organisation called for urgent action at a seminar on refugee rehabilitation in Batticaloa in mid-May. Over 85 per cent of Batticaloa's population are on food stamps and some 18,000 houses have been destroyed, the meeting was told.

Disaster

Landslides caused by flash floods killed over 170 people in the tea-growing areas of Kegalle District, 45 miles north-east of Colombo in early June. Around 100,000 people have been made homeless and the Sri Lankan Red Cross has called for international assistance.

An IMF reprieve and a World Bank ultimatum

FOLLOWING discussions in Colombo earlier this month with representatives of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the second instalment of an IMF loan worth around \$87 million will be made available to Sri Lanka in October. The Sri Lankan Government is likely to increase commercial borrowing - around \$50 million this year so far - to bridge the gap and to promote Treasury bonds at 17 per cent interest, to raise money through non-inflationary sources.

THE ECONOMY

The World Bank wants Sri Lanka's ailing tea industry made viable and says further aid is likely to depend on streamlining and increased productivity throughout Sri Lanka's public sector. The tea industry currently generates one third of Sri Lanka's export earnings, employs 1.5 million people and loses \$20 million per year. High production costs and a world tea surplus means the restructuring will have to

be radical. Plantation Industries Minister Gamini Dissanayake, elected chairman of the inter-governmental group on tea at the FAO conference in Rome on 9 May, will seek agreements to regulate world production and prices. Proposals now being examined in Sri Lanka include centralising estate management and reducing the working week from six to five days. To get organised labour to accept wage cuts remains a formidable task, but there may be little alternative.

THE NORTH AND EAST

Anarchy in the East: conspiracy or communalism?

TENSION is running high on Sri Lanka's eastern seaboard after another month of clashes between Muslims and Tamil militants. Over 15,000 Muslims and some 4,000 Tamils in the Sammanthurai area south of Batticaloa, took refuge in schools and places of worship when 300 houses were set on fire in mid-May, following a spate of reciprocal killings and kidnappings in the area.

At Muttur south of Trincomalee, one person was killed and nine wounded on 18 May, when Indian troops opened fire on 1,000 stone-throwing Muslims protesting against the killing of four people by unidentified Tamil youth.

A joint Indian and Sri Lankan Army Committee of Enquiry into

the violence was immediately set up as State Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne reiterated his promise - now some six weeks old - to disarm all armed groups and militias in the Eastern Province.

The killing of five more Muslims at Akkaraipattu on 31 May, has further inflamed the situation however, and it will not be swiftly settled. Curfew has been clamped down on Kalmunai and the surrounding areas and joint Sri Lankan Army/IPKF patrols will be introduced at the request of Muslim leaders.

Various conspiracy theories are now circulating over this latest outbreak of communal killings. Pro-Indian Tamil groups - especially

PLOTE and ENDLF - have been widely blamed for instigating the violence, largely it is said, to provoke Muslim retaliation. This would in turn promote civil disorder and demand a higher IPKF deployment in the area. As the IPKF presence increases so does the ascendancy - and some say the impunity - of the Tamil groups. About 700 people surrounded the ENDLF office in Sammanthurai on 20 May and forcibly removed the body of a Muslim youth which had been concealed on the premises.

Others have said the Government is dragging its feet on the disturbances, in the hope that Muslims will vote with the Sinhalese population against the permanent merger of the North and East in the proposed referendum of 5 July. Trouble in the area began only, it is said, after EPRLF and Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) representatives wrote to the President opposing the referendum - and some see the disturbances as a cynical attempt to persuade the SLMC to change sides.

The LTTE will also oppose the referendum and the Government may yet choose to delay it, with talks at a delicate stage.

As to who will police the Eastern Province, with the Indians earmarked for withdrawal and the newly-formed Civilian Volunteer Force (CVF) generally regarded as the military arm of the EPRLF, it seems likely that the Sri Lankan Army will come to play an increasingly central role.

Jaffna feels the pressure

VIOLENT confrontation between militants and Indian Forces has continued in Jaffna despite the peace talks in Colombo. No ceasefire seems imminent and the civilian population remains under pressure from all sides.

Observers estimate as many as 100 Indian soldiers have been killed this month as the IPKF stepped up operations in the peninsula using fresh troops from India.

Ten Indian soldiers were killed in a LTTE ambush at Murosuivil near Elephant Pass, Jaffna's main artery to the south, on 14 May. A number of civilians are feared dead in shooting incidents involving IPKF soldiers following militant attacks.

A LTTE *hartal* (general strike) called to protest the killing of a number of prominent citizens, shut down Jaffna for five days. Those killed included A Ahilan (19), son of the editor of Jaffna newspaper *Murasoli*, and student leader Gopalakrishnan (19). Both were taken away by unidentified youths whom local opinion has connected to the EPRLF.

LTTE wall posters have appeared throughout Jaffna threatening the

death penalty to those who cooperate in any way with the IPKF. Nelliady Citizens' Committee former President, V Mahalingam, was killed on 6 May and the LTTE subsequently claimed responsibility.

Travel inside and outside the peninsula remains difficult and dangerous. Armed youths accompanied by the IPKF have stopped the Jaffna/Colombo train several times this month, arresting passengers. Following a militant attack on an IPKF checkpoint at Kaithady on 2 May, bus passengers were assaulted and a number later hospitalised.

REHABILITATION A SERIES of top-level discussions to speed up the resettlement of Sinhalese refugees in the Trincomalee area has begun, Rehabilitation Minister Vincent Perera, said in Colombo on 18 May.

Over 2,000 Sinhalese in the Fort Frederick area and another 2,500 at Sangamitta - some of whom fled ethnic violence over three years ago - will be resettled in their traditional villages rather than relocated to other camps, the Minister said.

Communal violence has continued at a number of refugee camps in Trincomalee. Tamil Government Officers went on strike earlier this year after a series of attacks on them by Sinhalese refugees camped in the *Kachcheri* area. Tamil and Muslim refugees will also be resettled shortly, said Mr Perera.

Five Tamils denied a refuge in Britain as legal wrangle continues

FIVE TAMILS who won an asylum appeal after being deported from Britain over a year ago must stay in Sri Lanka, said High Court Judge Mr Justice McGowan on 17 May until Government appeals against their return to Britain are heard.

The Immigration Appeals Tribunal decided in March all five were entitled to asylum in Britain. After hearing evidence of their continuing maltreatment in Sri Lanka, the Tribunal ruled that they should be returned to Britain "with the minimum of delay". An appeal against the Tribunal decision by the Home Secretary Mr Douglas Hurd was rejected when it arrived outside the 14-day time limit after being incorrectly addressed. But the High Court has now ruled that the Home Office have "an arguable case" and have scheduled a judicial review of the Tribunal's findings in mid-July.

Whether the Government wins or loses, further appeals are likely legal sources say, and the stop on the

Tamils' return to Britain may remain in force. Three of them were detained and reportedly tortured by security forces after being deported to Sri Lanka. The other two are said to be in hiding.

Condemnation of the government's intransigence has

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been widespread. The British Council of Churches has written to the Home Office asking Mr Hurd to accept the Tribunal's findings and the Dean of Westminster, the Very Rev Michael Mayne, in a letter to the press on 18 May, said that only the setting up of a fully independ-

ent and impartial Tribunal for refugees would safeguard the rights of asylum-seekers.

Other evidence has recently emerged of the Treasury Solicitors Department writing to Immigration Adjudicators who hear appeals, suggesting certain decisions were "lenient" and that "a more uniformly robust and aggressive attitude" was required.

British agencies working with refugees are campaigning for a proper right of appeal before removal for all asylum-seekers.

Solicitors for the five Tamils have taken their case to the European Commission for Human Rights who will hear it on 7 July. They allege breaches of the European Convention of Human Rights - that the Tamils have suffered "inhuman and degrading treatment" (Article 3) and that UK laws and procedures provide "no effective remedy" (Article 13) for refugees whose claims are rejected.

Holland's hard-line asylum policy arrested by Tamil appeals

HOLLAND's hard-line policy on Tamil asylum-seekers has been tempered by a series of decisions at the Appeal Court in Amsterdam on 25 May. In 11 appeals on behalf of Tamils refused asylum last year, the Court decided that there were reasonable grounds for appeal in five cases. Four of the appellants were women who had been the victims of sexual violence in Sri Lanka.

In the six other cases, the Court decided not enough information was available on the security situation in Sri Lanka and adjourned proceedings until 22 June, instructing the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to submit a formal report on Sri Lanka when the court reconvenes.

The Dutch Refugee Council has already asked its government to set up an independent Commission of Enquiry that would be able to provide an accurate and up-to-date assessment to the Dutch Courts. Recent reports from the office by

international refugee agency UNHCR in Holland have been described by human rights lawyers as "conflicting and opaque".

Other legal sources say the 25 May decision is important, not for reiter-

ating that Sri Lankan Tamils may have a well-founded fear of persecution, but for questioning the legitimacy of deportation while appeal proceedings are underway. Five of the 11 asylum-seekers were removed to Sri Lanka in June 1988 and the others went underground in Europe.

Holland is said to have returned up to 20 asylum-seekers to Sri Lanka this year, but further deportations are unlikely before the 22 June hearing and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs report.

In a bizarre sequel to the hunger strike by Tamil asylum-seekers at Schiphol airport's detention facility last month, 22 Sri Lankan Tamils escaped from the centre on 15 May using cutting tools left behind by workmen. They are also said to have gone underground but are likely to surface if there are signs of a more favourable climate for Tamil asylum-seekers after 22 June.

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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