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Tamil Tigers declare peace while India prepares for war

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan government have agreed to a permanent cessation of hostilities, announced Industries Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe on 27 June during the second round of peace talks with the Tamil militants in Colombo.

The agreement, ending a 17-year guerrilla conflict was reached, said Mr Wickremasinghe, in support of President Premadasa's call for the withdrawal of Indian troops from Sri Lanka by the end of July. The LTTE now believed all outstanding issues could be settled through negotiation.

India's response to Mr Premadasa's request has been muted but intractable. The time frame is far too short, says India, to remove its 50,000 troops from the North and East and while the LTTE has agreed to a cessation of hostilities they have said nothing about surrendering arms. Until they do so Indian troops would remain to safeguard the interests of the Tamil people and the democratically-elected Provisional Council (PC) government in the North and East, maintained an In-

dian communique of 29 June.

The PC government run by a coalition of Indian-backed Tamil groups led by the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) fear they will be ousted from office by Mr Premadasa and liquidated by the LTTE in a bloody free-for-all as part of the Tiger's price for peace.

The PC government has become increasingly isolated over the last few months as much-needed funds to implement devolution and development have remained bureaucratically blockaded in Colombo despite the entreaties of EPRLF PC leader Mr A Varadaraja Perumal.

The Government's peace pact with the LTTE has received a strained welcome in Colombo and is unlikely, observers say, to survive any eventual Indian withdrawal. The Indian and Sri Lankan governments and their respective protégés are now being urged to abandon their hard-line positions by a variety of potential mediators including Rural

Industrial Development Minister Mr S Thondaman, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Dr M Karunanidhi and the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS).

Multilateral discussions towards implementation of a phased withdrawal of Indian forces has been the most favoured compromise but the long-distance poker game between New Delhi and Colombo seems set to continue. A summit meeting of Foreign Minister of countries belonging to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was abandoned in Islamabad in late June when Sri Lanka declined to attend since bilateral issues with other countries - i.e. Sri Lanka's relations with India - could not be discussed.

If anything, the conflict in the North and East now seems likely to escalate. LTTE sources say India has reinforced its troops in the last two weeks and is preparing for a major offensive. Much of Jaffna, Mannar and Mullaitivu is now under Indian curfew and there is an air of nervous expectancy. Clashes between the LTTE and Indian forces have continued since the peace talks began in early May and a recent LTTE statement said 51 Tigers and 93 Indian soldiers had died in the last four weeks of fighting.

Observers say Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi may decide to render the peace talks obsolete by wiping out the higher echelons of LTTE leadership, marooned in the Vavuniya jungles and risk an electoral backlash from 60 million Tamils in south India where *Tamil Eelam* or independence is fast becoming a forgotten issue.

India and Sri Lanka either seem on course for collision or trapped in a dangerous game of bluff that may yet lead to blunder.

Sri Lanka re-imposes State of Emergency

A STATE OF EMERGENCY giving widespread powers of arrest and detention to Sri Lanka's security forces was declared by President Ranasinghe Premadasa on 20 June after a series of strikes and demonstrations, inspired by the Sinhalese insurgent People's Liberation Front (JVP), brought Colombo and the south to a standstill.

As the deadline expired on a JVP demand for all Indian nationals to leave Sri Lanka by 14 June, an island-wide strike by the Sri Lanka Transport Board crippled public transport. A series of rallies organised by the Inter-University Students Federation called for the immediate withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF).

A 24-hour curfew imposed by the JVP closed down Colombo on 26 June while the southern towns of Galle and Hambantota - both JVP strongholds - were relatively unaffected. Food shortages have however triggered panic buying and escalating prices. The JVP have demanded a boycott of all Indian goods and services in Sri Lanka.

Since the last Emergency was lifted in January releasing over 1,800 JVP suspects from detention without trial, more than 1,700 people have been killed, official estimates say. Other sources are less conservative. Figures released by *The Sunday Times* (Colombo) on 18 June, say 4,601 people were killed in the first five months of this year.

Colombo under siege as JVP agitation mounts

COLOMBO showed all the signs of a city under siege this month as a concerted JVP campaign emptied the streets and filled five-star hotels with Indian diplomats.

The anti-Indian agitation is having a pervasive effect. Shops and offices of Indian origin remain closed. Colombo Port workers have refused to unload ships containing Indian produce and the Sri Lankan Transport Board strike, now in its second week, has forced the army to run a skeleton bus service in urban areas. Hindi and Tamil videos, once a staple item of consumption, have disappeared from the shelves and advertisements for Indian-made products from the newspapers. Banks and government offices function for no more than a few hours a day and the government is worried about potential food shortages and the curtailment of the capital's commercial life.

The 14 June JVP deadline for Indian nationals to leave the country came and went in an eerie atmosphere of anti-climax with Colombo and the provinces quiet but tense. Security forces remained on full alert as the expected JVP offensive failed to materialise. Most Indian nationals had already withdrawn to selected Colombo hotels guarded by Indian soldiers and were joined by the capital's Indian diplomatic corps.

Local sources said the JVP had postponed major agitation to allow public servants to be paid and flood relief to arrive in affected areas but it is clear that a full-scale war of attrition is now underway with the civil sector as the battleground.

A wave of demonstrations organised by the JVP-inspired Inter-University Students Federation (IUSF) and the "National Students Centre" (NSC) which claims to represent four million students kept schools and colleges closed.

Three people were killed and two injured at Katupotha in Kurunegala District on 12 June when police fired on a demonstration demanding an immediate IPKF withdrawal.

Mr Premadasa's administration is clearly rattled and has imposed a deadline of its own as Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne, in a speech in mid-June, gave senior security officials three months to solve the JVP problem or face the consequences.

Security forces commanders in Uva Province and Badulla District were summarily removed and Anuradhapura Police Chief DIG Udugampola banished to the volatile Central Province.

Observers say Mr Wijeratne's desperate measures have sent a shock wave through the military that may only serve to increase growing disillusion and discontent with the present administration.

Relief delegation

Welfare organisations including the Islamic Relief Organisation visited the Sammanthurai area south of Batticaloa in early June, at the invitation of Trade Minister A R Mansoor to assess rehabilitation needs following three months of ethnic clashes between Tamils and Muslims which have displaced over 10,000 people.

In memory

Memorial meetings were held in the UK and in Sri Lanka on 19 June for Mr K Kanthasamy, a leading figure in rehabilitation and reconciliation work among the Tamil community, who disappeared in Jaffna a year ago.

Junk bonds

The Sri Lankan Government moved a resolution in Parliament on 20 June to issue high-interest Treasury bonds in an attempt to raise Rs 1,000 million (\$ 30 million) from the country's burgeoning black economy and stave off financial crisis.

Car-bomb

Three people were killed and 25 injured in the southern town of Galle on 28 June when a car-bomb exploded outside the town hall where a meeting of the Southern Provincial Council was underway.

300 dead, 100,000 homeless after flash floods

FLASH FLOODS devastated Sri Lanka's central and southern Districts in early June, causing landslides which killed almost 300 people and left over 100,000 homeless.

Almost 250 of the fatalities were in Kegalle where sudden earthslips engulfed villages in Sri Lanka's worst natural disaster for 40 years.

Colombo was threatened for a time, as the Kelani river on its outskirts flooded low-lying suburbs but by 8 June, water levels began to recede.

Government Agents in affected areas have moved swiftly to supply emergency accommodation and dry rations but there is concern over a shortage of drinking water and a growing public health threat from dysentery and other water-borne diseases in the Kolonnawa and Matale areas.

The Sri Lankan government and a variety of welfare agencies have made wide-ranging appeals for international assistance. The USA, Canada and EEC countries have already made substantial contribu-

tions and local service agencies such as the Sri Lankan Red Cross Society and the Lions Club have mounted relief programmes drawing on donations from international partners.

Minister of Housing and Construction Mr B Sirisena Cooray estimates almost 100,000 homes, mostly belonging to low-income families need substantial repair. There is concern however that local authorities will not allow rebuilding in flood-vulnerable areas and that people will be pushed into tea-estate areas increasing social tension.

India is training surrogate troops in the North say refugees in Colombo

Young Tamils flee forcible conscription

ALMOST five thousand youths, many of them students, have been forcibly inducted into the Civilian Volunteer Force (CVF) by the IPKF and allied Tamil militant groups in the North and East during the last few weeks. A 12,000 strong Additional Citizens Voluntary Force trained by the Indian intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and the IPKF is being prepared, sources say, to combat the Tigers should the Indians withdraw.

There has been an influx of Tamil youth into Colombo in the last few days fleeing forced conscription into the new militias. Reports speak of Tamil youths being abducted at

check points and removed to training camps.

The Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), one of the Tamil militant groups which have supported the IPKF during the last two years, in its offensive against the Tigers, surprisingly dissociated itself from the IPKF conscription and called for the youths' release.

Following the demand by President Premadasa for the withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka before 29 July, a number of demonstrations in the North and East, demanding that IPKF should stay until the security of the Tamils was guaranteed, indicated the dilemma

faced by many people.

In Batticaloa 15,000 people marched carrying banners and shouting slogans in support of the IPKF. Public meetings were held in Jaffna, Vavuniya, Batticaloa and Trincomalee. Addressing one of the meetings, North-East Provincial Council Chief Minister A Varadaraja Perumal said that the IPKF should not leave Sri Lanka until the "permanent security of the Tamils was ensured and all powers had been granted to the Provincial Council."

Batticaloa MP Sam Tambimuttu said that Tamil groups had disarmed under guarantees given by India and consequently the IPKF should not be withdrawn until the promises made by India to the Tamil people were fulfilled.

In Colombo the LTTE dismissed these protests and suggested that these had been organised with 'sinister motives' by the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the other Tamil groups aligned to the IPKF. LTTE also accused the IPKF of forcibly obtaining signatures on a petition asking the IPKF not to withdraw.

The dilemma facing many Tamils in the East is nonetheless authentic and unenviable. Observers say many people believe that a bloodbath is inevitable, should the IPKF withdraw before the creation of a strong and well-trained defence force and the future role of the Sri Lankan Army is clarified.

No peace in the North

CLASHES between Tamil militant groups, kidnappings and executions have continued throughout June in the North and East. In mid-June, six members of the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS), who had been sent from Jaffna by their leader V. Balakumar for discussions with IPKF officers in Vavuniya, were found dead at Sinnaputhukkulam, a few miles from Vavuniya. At the inquest, it was revealed that the victims had been tortured before being killed.

Following these killings Balakumar announced that 84 EROS members had been assassinated by various factions, the IPKF and the Sri Lankan security forces, since the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord. He pointed out that EROS has been compelled to take up arms once again to defend themselves. On 10 June four members of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) were shot dead allegedly by the LTTE.

During the month there was a spate of kidnappings in the North and East. Five of the six Jaffna residents kidnapped from their homes and two youths kidnapped from Kalmunaikudi in Batticaloa were later found dead.

Despite the LTTE's negotiations

with the Sri Lankan government in Colombo, clashes continued between the LTTE and the IPKF in the North and East. The Tigers claimed that in attacks on the IPKF towards the end of June in Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi 25 soldiers were killed while losing 15 of its members. In the shelling that followed the attacks in Kilinochchi a number of houses were damaged.

During the confrontation between LTTE and IPKF at Mamunai in Jaffna a large amount of fishing equipment belonging to fishermen of the area was damaged. Many people have fled seeking safety in surrounding villages.

Relief payments promised for ex-detainees

North-East Provincial Council (N-E PC) sources say that Rupees 4.6 million has been allocated towards relief payment for the Tamil youths who were held in custody by the Sri Lankan security forces and released after the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord. Former detainees will receive a lump sum payment of Rupees 2000 each from the Government Agent.

A further amount of Rupees 88.5 million has been earmarked for the rehabilitation of displaced families

from Vavuniya and Mullaitivu districts currently being resettled under an integrated rehabilitation programme.

Payments will be made to families for dry rations, resettlement, self-help projects and construction of houses and there will be compensation for deaths and injury.

The programme will be implemented by officers appointed under the direction of the Government Agents, N-E PC sources say.

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