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Devolution talks deadlocked

THE LATEST ROUND of discussions in Colombo between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) reached a critical juncture in late April when the Tigers declared themselves "dissatisfied" with progress in the talks.

The LTTE seeks speedy dissolution of the North-East Provincial Council (N-E PC), repeal of the Sixth Amendment outlawing separatism and fresh PC elections with international observers. The Government requires the Tigers to disarm before admitting them to the democratic process. The result is a stalemate but the discussions remain shrouded in secrecy - so much so that Sri Lanka's Opposition parties have formed a common front to elicit details of the dialogue.

On 15 May, the Government will resume discussions with the former N-E PC administration led by the Indian-backed militant Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) who fled into exile with the last of the Indian Forces.

If the now defunct N-E PC does not meet by 1 June it is automatically dissolved and fresh elections can be timetabled. But there is also speculation that the Government may keep the present N-E PC alive in name only, for a few more months, to wring disarmament concessions from the LTTE. Whatever strange political hybrid emerges from these machinations it is clear that few expect the Tigers and the Sri Lankan Government to live happily ever after.

As LTTE Commander-in-Chief Velupillai Prabhakaran reappeared in Jaffna in early April and the Tiger takeover of the North and East seemed complete, there were serious clashes between police and civilians in Jaffna, Trincomalee

Tigers take over the police in the North-East

and Batticaloa. In Jaffna on 11 April 20 civilians were assaulted in the Point Pedro area, after protests outside the police station. There were further incidents at Valvettithurai as LTTE cadres closed down both police stations.

Justice Minister ACS Hameed rushed to Jaffna to meet Prabhakaran, ostensibly to discuss relief and reconstruction, and a major incident was averted as the police stations reopened a few days later.

But it is clear that neither the police nor the Army are happy with their now-negligible role in law-and-order in the N-E. In mid-April the Tigers banned the public from lodging complaints of any kind with the police, saying justice would be dispensed by the LTTE.

Whatever the motives for Mr Hameed's visit, there is a great deal of relief and reconstruction to be done in Jaffna. Government Agent Anton Alfred says 45,383 houses need rebuilding - only 1,754 will be tackled this year. Mr Alfred has written to N-E PC Chief Secretary Ganeshanathan requesting \$2 million for urgent relief.

In other respects, Jaffna is rapidly returning to normal with shops, offices and schools functioning regularly. Sinhalese traders have returned to Mannar and Jaffna for the first time in two years, assuring regular supplies of fruit and vegetables to the arid North. A fuel crisis was avoided in mid-April when two large oil consignments arrived by rail. The military presence is low although unarmed LTTE cadres in jungle fatigues are a common sight.

Where there are questions - both from the Government and the man in the street - is whether the Tigers' disciplinarian attitude to social control is the precursor to

military dictatorship in the N-E - elected or otherwise? The Tigers' expropriation of police functions also serves useful fundraising purposes. Fines ranging from the paltry to thousands of rupees are now in force for a variety of

offences. A complaint is made to LTTE, the offender "tried" at the local *People's Front* office or LTTE camp and sentence passed.

But there is growing concern over those who may have been detained in the "dark rooms" of LTTE camps, many of them suspected of support for the former EPRLF-run regime.

Unconfirmed reports say the Tigers have posted a notice at Jaffna *kachcheri* (local government office) saying they are holding almost 1,000 people and enquiries should be registered at Thirunelvely *People's Front* office. Some 89 people were released by LTTE in Jaffna on 28 April after extended questioning but there is growing uncertainty over the fate of others.

The same day, EPRLF MP Yogasari told Parliament in Colombo that he was submitting 600 affidavits to human rights agency Amnesty International on behalf of those detained.

Many fear that whatever formula is eventually floated for new elections the Tigers' iron grip on local life will lead inexorably to a one-party state in the N-E. Critics say the LTTE has always styled itself as "the sole legitimate representative of the Tamil people" and point to the takeover of the Tamil Congress party's Jaffna office in early April and continuing speculation over LTTE involvement in the murder of TULF moderate leaders Amirthalingam and Yogeswaran, fuelled by a press interview with second-in-command *Mahattaya* last month.

N-E Governor Lt.Gen.Nalin Seneviratne says it is now up to the Tigers to create "acceptable conditions" for free and fair elections before the PC can be dissolved. For the Government this would require at least some cosmetic demilitarisation with perhaps, as Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne told Parliament in late April, some of the Tigers joining the police and the Army. At least one MP's reply was unequivocal, "The Tigers will not join you. You will have to join the Tigers".

■ Sri Lanka's balance of payments position was bolstered in mid-April by agreements for a US \$ 90 million World Bank loan to supplement the present International Monetary Fund stabilisation support programme. Two World Bank teams are at present in Colombo, one preparing the Bank's annual country report to be submitted to the Paris Aid Group meeting, said now to be postponed until October. The second team is carrying out an impact study on how the Bank stabilisation programme affects Sri Lanka's poor.

INDIA

EPRLF in exile: limbo or long-term threat?

IN AN ISOLATED BUNGALOW surrounded by Indian Security men in the tribal areas of Orissa State, EPRLF Secretary General K. Padmanabha coolly surveys what remains of the pro-Indian Tamil militants - 1,600 men, women and children from EPRLF, ENDLF and TELO evacuated from northern Sri Lanka two weeks before the Indian pull-out in late March.

They are housed at Malkangiri, 127 kms from Koraput in three transit camps built for 30,000 Hindu refugees fleeing communal strife in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) in the mid-'60s. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi refused the Sri Lankan refugees shelter fearing the State would become a battleground for rival militant groups.

Their arrival has sparked resentment among the local population, largely fomented by rural Congress politicians, who fear a law-and-order problem. After the discovery of a low-power transmitter, authorities suspect the militants have made contact with the People's War Group, a leftist guerrilla force operating in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh who had links with most of the Sri Lankan insurgents during their years of exile in the 1980s. While rumours of arms caches continue, business has been brisk in the bazaar with the new arrivals pushing up the prices of basic commodities.

Security is tightest around the Sagituda reservoir camp, where Padmanabha and a number of senior EPRLF politicians are housed. TELO and ENDLF cadres are kept separately at two high schools at Malkangiri Town. Speaking to the press in mid-April, Padmanabha said they would resume the armed struggle if Sri Lanka did not meet

a 19-point charter of demands. Colombo has agreed to talks with EPRLF on 15 May and will use them as part of their delaying tactics for devolution, observers say, in negotiations with LTTE.

EPRLF say there are still thousands of cadres who have fled into the Sri Lankan jungles and will continue to harry the LTTE but few believe this, given the militants' dismal military performance in the last months.

Indian interventionism remains, however, a convenient bogey for both sides. LTTE theoretician Anton Balasingham told newsmen earlier this month that India's CIA - the Research and Analysis Wing - were training 3,000 cadres of EPRLF's Tamil National Army in Pondicherry, south India for an eventual assault on northern Sri Lanka. There was thus no question of the Tigers disarming, he said.

LTTE sea patrols have tightened a cordon around the northern coastline seizing 70 Indian fishing boats off Karainagar for straying into Sri Lankan territorial waters. The LTTE blockade has also prevented Sri Lankan refugees in south India returning to Jaffna, observers say. Indian Home Minister Mufti Mohammed says there are still 93,576 Sri Lankan refugees in south India including 5,359 in camps in Tamil Nadu and Orissa.

For the former militants, Orissa is nothing less than limbo. Some 200 were arrested on the run in Tamil Nadu in late April and General Secretary G. Gnanasekaran says ENDLF will petition foreign embassies for rehabilitation assistance if they cannot be resettled in India's southern states. Tamil Nadu's Mr Karunanidhi would prefer to send them to the Andaman Islands - a penal settlement in colonial times.

Amnesty

W W Rohana Silva, the Sri Lankan sailor who attacked Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi with a rifle-butt in Colombo in 1987, was freed on 2 April as part of an amnesty for 800 prisoners.

Missing

Ranjith Perera of Panadura filed complaint before the Supreme Court in early April after his brother G Premalal de Silva and his parents disappeared during a visit to Panadura police station in December last year. A month earlier, Mr de Silva had instigated court proceedings alleging police torture.

Boycott

Sri Lanka will not participate in the annual summit of the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in the Maldives later this year if an earlier postponed session is not held in Colombo, said Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne on 12 April.

Speculation

Prices of bread, flour and pulses have continued to escalate in April amid mounting rumour that the Government is about to eliminate subsidies on key commodities in line with current World Bank recommendations.

Damage

Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne told a Cabinet news briefing on 19 April that damage to public property as a result of JVP violence in Sri Lanka's south and central areas was over US \$25 million. In the Plantation sector where 40 factories were burnt down, US \$20 million would be needed, said the minister.

Sri Lanka anticipates tourist boom in 1990

ALMOST 80,000 tourists arrived in Sri Lanka in the first three months of this year - 100% more than the same period last year - raising hopes of a revival for the island's flagging holiday industry. Tourism is Sri Lanka's third largest foreign exchange earner and despite large-scale insurgency over 180,000 people took advantage of cut-price five-star hotel package holidays in 1989. At its height before 1983 close to a million holi-

daymakers visited Sri Lanka every year.

A Sri Lankan delegation took a high profile at the annual marketplace for the world's travel industries, the International Tourism Exchange, held in Berlin earlier this month. Both the Government and the LTTE are keen to boost the holiday revival as part of the drive for development. A key representative of Sri Lanka's hotel industry recently undertook a fact-finding mission to Trinco-

malee along with senior representatives of the fishing and mineral industries. A few intrepid tourists have already returned to Trincomalee's Nilaveli beach but facilities remain marginal. Security may remain a problem in some areas. A party of ten West German and Belgian tourists were waylaid on 10 April near Sigiriya, a popular tourist attraction 100 miles from Colombo, and robbed of cash and valuables worth US\$35,000.

Law and order still a problem in the East

Tigers tame Trincomalee

POLICE CLASHED with civilians in LTTE-controlled Trincomalee on 10 April when they fired into a crowd, seriously injuring two people at Veeranagar. Sources say the dispute originated in the harassment of a local woman but is indicative of the growing tension between the police and the new LTTE administration. After negotiations with the Tigers the Veeranagar police contingent was withdrawn.

Following the Indian pullout, LTTE control of the District has been swift and comprehensive. A high profile public relations exercise similar to that carried out in Batticaloa began with LTTE District organiser *Ruban* touring schools in Nilaveli, Thambalakamam and Kantalai in early April to encourage education and social development.

The LTTE has outlawed unemployment, making it compulsory for local youths to find jobs. Local businesses are being told they must offer youth employment and training programmes to those in the immediate vicinity. A predictable array of taxes has been imposed on alcohol and cigarettes and on all commercial enterprises.

Discipline is tight. A LTTE area leader was transferred out of the District for levying less than the imposed tax. In Muthur, a prominent LTTE member was shot dead in early April. A note found near his body accused him of rape and surrendering to security forces. The Tigers clearly mean to lead by example.

There were meetings and processions throughout the North-East on 19 April to remember Mrs Poopathy Kanapathipil-

lai, who died two years earlier after a 30 day fast demanding an immediate ceasefire. LTTE leader and President of the Tigers' political party, the *People's Front of the Liberation Tigers* (PFLT), *Mahattaya*, addressing a large rally in Trincomalee, explained that until the North and East was accepted as the traditional Tamil homeland, there would be no peace.

Fears of a clash between Tamils and 2,000 Sinhalese refugee families at Fort Frederick, subsided after ringleaders were isolated by the Sri Lankan Army. The others were told they must now return to their homes. The refugees, mostly Sinhalese fishermen, were settled in Sirimapura and other villages outside Trincomalee by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) in the 1970s. There are some 16,000 Sinhalese refugees in Trincomalee, mostly from fishing families. Sinhalese fishermen from the south-west coast who traditionally migrate to eastern fishing grounds off Trincomalee have been told by the LTTE that each *wadiya* (fishing cooperative) must pay Rs50,000 (US \$1,250) for the ten month season. Disgruntled fishermen say dry-fish *mudalalis* (merchants) who often finance boats and nets are also passing on LTTE surcharges to them.

Batticaloa's hangover

TENSION REMAINS high between the LTTE and the police in Batticaloa after two incidents during Tamil and Sinhalese New Year, which fell over Easter weekend and was celebrated widely throughout the island for the first time in years.

On Good Friday police caused panic by firing over the heads of people returning from church. Four policemen abducted by LTTE cadres were later released. On Easter Sunday, after a stone-throwing incident outside Batticaloa Police Station the LTTE detained three police officers. Following negotiations with senior police officials, 67 policemen were transferred out of the District to avoid further confrontation.

There is also continuing tension between the Tigers and the Muslim community. In Amparai, 18 Muslims returning from Sainthamarathu mosque were abducted on 12 April after the removal of an LTTE flag near the mosque. A spokesman for the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress alleged they were taken to Karaitivu camp and tortured before being released.

Justice in Amparai seems closely tied in with LTTE's present fundraising strategies. LTTE District leader *Castro* said fines between Rs 3,000 and Rs 25,000 would be imposed for those illegally tap-

ping electricity and brewing illicit liquor. On-the-spot fines of Rs 50 are already in force for more than two people travelling on a motorbike - a common practice.

There are however hopeful signs for the economy as many traders who fled the area during the Indian occupation begin to return to their businesses.

Citizenship wrangle continues for Plantation Tamils

THE FATE of 80,000 Plantation Tamils granted Indian citizenship and awaiting repatriation is still unclear after a meeting on 1 May in New Delhi between Indian and Sri Lankan Prime Ministers VP Singh and DB Wijetunge.

100,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in south India must return to the island, said Mr Singh before the status of the repatriates could be discussed.

Many of the original applicants for Indian citizenship granted under the Indo-Ceylon agreement of 1964, are now dead and few of their children still wish to return to the sub-continent. New Plantations Minister Mr Ranjan Wijeratne however is unsympathetic and keen to facilitate their speedy removal.

Mr Wijeratne says the cluster system of Plantation management, introduced by his predecessor and heavily criticised

by Trade Unions, will be reviewed. A comprehensive collective agreement between the Plantation corporations and the two major Trade Unions will also be promoted says the minister. Observers say this has been on the agenda since the United National Party took office in 1977.

Two Plantation workers Velayutham and Mookiah were shot dead by the Army on Glen Alpin Estate in Badulla District on 10 April. Three others were injured. The shooting occurred when attempts to arrest two youths were thwarted by a crowd of workers. Mr Wijeratne has ordered an inquiry into the incident.

Mr Abdul Azeez, President of the Democratic Workers Congress died on 29 April after over 50 years of service to the Plantation Trade Union.

INDEPENDENT COMMITTEES TO GUARANTEE SAFETY FOR JVP SURRENDER

Pacification programme underway in the South

ALL OFFENSIVE military operations against the rebel People's Liberation Front (JVP) were suspended on 19 April after Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne announced the formation of an Independent Surrender Committee to facilitate the peace process in the South.

The formation of the Committee, which will have one representative from each of ten political parties, was the key recommendation of a Presidential Youth Affairs Commission set up to resolve the crisis of youth revolt.

District Surrender Committees consisting of religious and community leaders will effect the surrender process and their activities will be monitored by 17 District Surrender Enquiry Committees each led by a retired judge. The Enquiry Committee will screen those surrendering and recommend immediate release or a period of rehabilitation. Criminal charges will be brought against those who have committed major crimes.

■ THE killing continues throughout southern Sri Lanka although on a much reduced scale - 15 severed heads were found near Bandatara bridge in Matara District in late March. In Galle, Anton Ranatunge, said to be a JVP suspect, stabbed and killed two women in early April.

Matara Police say two persons were arrested for printing national Identity Cards. A printing machine was also found. At Ittapatuwa in Moneragala District, a suspected militant was shot dead by the *Special Task Force*. A JVP military wing leader was arrested at Rangala in the Moneragala District on 5 April. Security sources say he was involved in a number of murders. Police recovered the beheaded bodies of three traders alleged to have been killed by the JVP in Karavila on 11 April.

The People's Bank in Uva Paranagama was robbed on 12 April by armed men who also shot dead the security officer. L A Wimal of Buttala and A Premaratne of Wellawaya were shot dead by unknown persons. In late April, a JVP area commander was arrested in Badulla and a 19 year old JVP activist said to be responsible for over 70 killings was arrested in Colombo.

Such checks and balances seem top-heavy on bureaucracy but, observers say, even such triple vetting may not inspire the necessary confidence. Only 35 surrendered to Committees in the first week.

THE JVP LEADER for Horana, south of Colombowas arrested with 50 others during a massive police sweep of the area on 8 April. M Siripala, alias *Horana Siri*, was arrested in possession of seven automatic weapons and over Rs.120,000 (\$3,000) in cash. Police believe he is responsible for several killings and attacks on local government offices last year.

Mr Wijeratne told Parliament during the Extension of the Emergency debate on 26 April that 8,493 people are currently in custody and a further 4,438 who surrendered earlier are already in ten rehabilitation camps.

Mr Wijeratne also said retrospective legislation would be introduced to permit life sentences for over 4,000 hard-core subversives detained - hardly an exercise in confidence building. But there are some promising signs - 300 rehabilitated youths were released from Anuradhapura Youth Camp at a high-profile ceremony on 30 April. Other indications are less positive. Of 6,000 weapons distributed to Government supporters during the JVP insurgency, over 4,000 have yet to be recovered. Other sources say arms distributed were many times the official figure.

The Government's growing confidence was illustrated by the repeal of a number of Emergency Regulations on 18 April, which allowed the requisition of

property, vehicles and personal services. Regulations permitting detention and banning public meetings were also repealed.

Some observers believe however that the remaining Regulations and the surrender process will subject most of the South to a screening process that will assume guilt before innocence. Those who do not surrender will remain under suspicion. Those who do should be monitored by independent observers.

The Press also came under pressure again this month when - referring to several columnists' predilection for speculating on the content of Cabinet discussions - the Government said it would take appropriate legal measures against publishers of classified information. There is already rigorous self-censorship by newspapers since the killing of journalist Richard de Zoysa in February and a strategic reduction of newsprint quotas released to Opposition papers will further emphasise the position.

■ ARRESTS of security personnel for criminal activities also continued throughout April. A Sub-Inspector of Police from Hambantota District and six others were arrested on 1 April for the abduction and murder of a soldier, Anura Gurusinghe. Two reserve policemen from Kollupitiya in Colombo were detained in early April after allegations of robbery and rape.

In Kegalle a policeman suspended from service was taken into custody with an unlicensed gun and a grenade. A reserve policeman from Panadura was arrested on rape charges.

Police said on 7 April that a Home Guard from the Meegallawa police station was arrested for involvement in five robberies in the Galhewa area. Police recovered a car and motor cycle during a search in Negombo and arrested four persons. One of them was a former Sub-Inspector and another a retired naval officer.

In mid-April a Sub Inspector from Horana police was arrested on rape charges and 13 persons including four soldiers were produced before the Colombo Additional Magistrate charged with numerous robberies in Colombo.

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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