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Premadasa promises LTTE fresh elections

AFTER a month of tense negotiations between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lanka Government, LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham announced in early June that President Premadasa had promised to introduce legislation within a week to dissolve the North-East Provincial Council (N-E PC) and allow fresh elections.

But there is no sign of an end to the political impasse - the Government insist that the Tigers disarm before contesting elections in the North-East - and Mr Balasingham's optimism may be premature. The Tigers' military hegemony is a growing political embarrassment to the Government. Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne denied he had ceded control of the North-East to the militants and stormed out of Parliament on 23 May refusing to answer further questions.

A kind of low-intensity shuttle diplomacy has taken hold throughout May, with Justice Minister Hameed's regular visits to Jaffna reciprocated by the arrival of an LTTE delegation in Colombo four or five days later. No progress is yet visible and Minister Hameed was adamant during discussions in Jaffna on 28 May, that disarmament was a prerequisite.

The Tigers, in turn, were incensed by the Government's decision to hold talks on 15 May with their former rivals the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation

Deadlock over disarmament threatens war

Front (EPRLF) who were ousted after the Indian withdrawal. EPRLF's demands were referred to the All Party Conference and the political wilderness. On 1 June, all 73 Provincial Councillors, including 38 from EPRLF, lost their seats after three months of no N-E PC sessions, leaving the election door open. But legal experts say Mr Premadasa still needs new legislation to clear the log jam. Technically, EPRLF and the others who ran a Vichy-style N-E PC for the Indians, have three months to select new representatives if invited by the Elections Commissioner.

The way forward now appears to be for another Tamil militant group EROS, who have effected a rapprochement with the LTTE, to table a motion in Parliament in mid June to repeal the Sixth Amendment. The Tigers say they will not participate in elections until the Amendment, which demands an overt disavowal of separatism from those in public life, is repealed.

Whether the Government has the necessary two-thirds majority in Parliament and whether the Tigers will then disarm to allow elections are open questions. A week in Sri Lankan politics is currently an eternity and a ripple of resentment on either side may yet derail the whole process. Equally, both sides are sobered by the high stakes they are playing for.

Accompanying these esoteric manoeuvres have been growing rumblings of war and international concern over the killing of LTTE opponents.

The Tigers are increasingly unnerved by Sri Lankan Air Force reconnaissance flights over Jaffna and the strengthening of the Army base at China Bay in Trincomalee. Fall-back plans for total war are clearly visible in Jaffna with the reappearance of makeshift fortifications. In the streets of Batticaloa, citizens' brigades have been called up to dig trenches, while being told that these are normal security precautions.

In Colombo, EPRLF MP Sam Thambimuttu was shot dead outside the Canadian embassy on 7 May. Mr Thambimuttu was to travel to Canada two days later, carrying the names of 600 people who had disappeared since the Tiger takeover in the North. The day before his death, the press reported the presence of a 15-man 'hit squad' in Colombo who had eliminated three TELO activists the previous week. Mr Thambimuttu's wife Kala died on 16 May from injuries sustained at her husband's shooting.

Human rights agency Amnesty International in an appeal to the LTTE on 30 May said the Tigers appeared to condone and threaten the extrajudicial execution of those it considered "traitors". Amnesty called for an end to incommunicado detention in the North-East, where over 800 EPRLF supporters are said to be imprisoned, and for due process of law and an end to extrajudicial killings. Amnesty also asked that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) be admitted to detention centres in the North-East. A meeting between the ICRC and LTTE in Colombo in early June was inconclusive.

Back at the negotiating table, time is running out for the Government and the LTTE. The question is no longer whether they want peace but whether they can prevent war.

A Colombo magistrate ordered the arrest of Senior Superintendent of Police Ronnie Gunesinghe, after an affidavit filed by Mrs Manorani Saravanamuttu on 1 June identified the policeman as one of a group of men who abducted her son, journalist Richard de Zoysa, found dead in February.

Counsel Batty Weerakoon told the court that his client had not divulged this information to the police for her own safety. Court proceedings revealed that after de Zoysa's abduction, former Defence Secretary Gen. Sepala Attygalle

had received assurances from Inspector General of Police Ernest Perera that the journalist was in safe hands. The case resumes on 11 June.

D Karunaratne, founder member of Students for Human Rights (SHR), was arrested by security forces at Colombo airport on 7 May, while boarding a plane to London. After diplomatic representations, police admitted they were holding Mr Karunaratne and said criminal charges would be filed against him shortly. Another SHR leader Gamini Seneviratne disappeared in December, allegedly after being taken into police custody.

Indian citizens must leave to create jobs says Ranjan Wijeratne

Sri Lanka threatens to expel Plantation Tamils

NORTH-EAST Sri Lanka came to a standstill on 21 May as the People's Front of the Liberation Tigers (PFLT) called a *hartal* (general strike) to protest against plans to repatriate 100,000 Plantation Tamils granted Indian citizenship under the Indo Ceylon agreement of 1964.

The strike, which was the first civil action called by the Tigers since talks began with the Government a year ago, shut down shops offices and transport in and out of the North-East. The repatriation issue was rekindled after talks between the Indian and Sri Lankan Prime Ministers in early May.

As the political sniping got underway, new Plantations Minister Ranjan Wijeratne said Indian passport holders had to go and if necessary would be given free air tickets to India because Sri Lankan workers were "knocking on the door for employment". Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi told the State Legislative Assembly, a few days later, that no Plantation Tamil could be repatriated while Sri Lankan refugees remained in south India.

Plantation Trade Unions have consistently opposed the repatriation of those who fall under the 1964 agreement. Many of the original applicants for Indian citizenship, they say, are now dead and few of their children still wish to return to the sub-continent. National Union of Workers President T Aiyadurai, says the Indo Ceylon agreement lapsed in 1985 and the Joint Committee of Plantation Trade Unions (JCPTU) called for a humane approach to the problem.

After assiduous lobbying by Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) President S Thondaman, State Information Minister

and CWC General Secretary MS Sellasamy announced on 14 May, that Sri Lanka would send a delegation to New Delhi to reopen discussions which would include a CWC representative.

A series of reports in south Indian newspapers last year, drew attention to the plight of 80,000 of the 460,000 Plantation Tamils repatriated since the 1964 agreement and settled in the Ootacamund hill tracts. Only 10,000 had received proper rehabilitation assistance and others were now virtually destitute.

Former CWC official P Chandrasekaran, now leader of the Upcountry People's Front (UPF), was arrested at Talawakelle on 15 May accused of militant activities. Local sources say his arrest followed attempts to launch protests against Government repatriation plans.

Around 10,000 Plantation workers on 14 estates began a strike on 16 May, demanding his release as hunger strikes began in temples in the Hatton and Talawakelle areas. After four days of mounting tension, Mr Chandrasekaran was released on 21 May on Rs 10,000 (\$200) bail to join a UPF delegation to meet Minister Ranjan Wijeratne. He assured them no Plantation Tamil would be forcibly repatriated.

The JCPTU, an amalgam of 11 Plantation Trade Unions, sent a memorandum this month to Minister Wijeratne reminding him that the Wages Board of the Tea Rubber Growing and Manufacturing Trades had not met for several years and that Plantation wages were depressed in relation to other manufacturing sectors. The JCPTU has demanded a Rs 200 a month increase and a further Rs 2 for every point increase on Sri Lanka's Cost of Living index which hit 977.6 in early April - keeping inflation at 14%.

Situations vacant

Over 87,000 applications have been received for 150 vacancies for manual workers in Sri Lanka's health services, official sources said in early May.

Aid boost

As a prelude to an official visit by Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu on 3 May, a Japanese embassy official announced in Colombo that Japan's aid to Sri Lanka this year would increase by 50% to US\$300 million.

New Blood

President Premadasa told the national executive of the ruling United National Party on 12 May, that legislation would soon be introduced making it compulsory for 40% of candidates at local elections to be between the ages of 18 to 35.

SOS

Sri Lanka is suffering from a chronic shortage of medical specialists and will appeal to the international community said Presidential Advisor Bradman Weerakoon on 17 May. Dengue fever is spreading throughout Colombo District where 13 people died and another 200 were treated for the disease this month.

Ban

The LTTE has banned south Indian Tamil publications *Kumudam*, *Thuklak*, *Pommai* and film magazines in Jaffna, allegedly to safeguard public morals and promote local publications.

Refugee appeal

After a visit to a Matale District refugee camp, Buddhist leader Mahanayake Thera Sri Chandananda petitioned President Premadasa in late May to rehabilitate Sinhalese refugees from the North-East, displaced since 1986.

Refugees released after protest fast

OVER 100 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees who escaped with their families from camps in Orissa were released from Madras Central prison in mid May after they began a hunger strike, demanding they be relocated in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu.

The refugees, former militants with EPRLF and other Indian-backed groups, had petitioned Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi over inadequate medical provisions in the Orissa

camps after a 12 year-old boy and a 22 year-old woman died from heatstroke. The escapees and their families have been sent to the Mandapam and Kottapattu camps south of Madras.

Mr Karunanidhi has reiterated his demand that all Tamil militants who fled Sri Lanka as part of the IPKF withdrawal be sent to the Andaman Islands - a penal settlement in colonial times.

There is still concern in Tamil Nadu over the undercover activities of feuding

Sri Lankan militants. Over 70 members of the Eelam People's Democratic Party, a little-known militant splinter group were arrested in a Madras suburb in early May with weapons and ammunition. Further south in Vellore, five members of PLOTE were arrested without identity papers. Opposition MP P R Kumaramangalam accused the Tamil Nadu government in late May, of colluding with the LTTE and actively encouraging sedition in the south Indian state.

Police cowed by Tiger strong-arm tactics

LTTE taxes Batticaloa's patience

LTTE taxes have hit Batticaloa hard, say local residents. Teachers must pay Rs100 a month and taxi drivers Rs10 for every fare. Batticaloa townsfolk say a variety of surcharges on essential goods and services are being passed on to them - pushing prices up to crisis levels. Those refusing or unable to pay the Tiger tax are abducted.

Former Batticaloa Mayor and TULF member R Ambalavanar was abducted in March by the LTTE and held at Pullumalai after a ransom demand of Rs 3 million. Sources say he was badly beaten while in custody. Following the intervention of Tiger leader Yogi, he was released on paying Rs500,000 (\$12,500).

Mr Ambalavanar died after a heart attack on 24 May.

Sources in Batticaloa say the LTTE has commandeered large houses belonging to Sinhalese businessmen who fled after the LTTE takeover last December. They are used as makeshift prisons for tax defaulters and as accommodation for Tiger VIPs.

Confrontations between the police and the Tigers have continued. On *Vesak*, a major Buddhist festival on 9 May, the LTTE enforced a ban on *pandals* (decorations) outside police stations and public buildings and staged a major power cut throughout the East. Over 60 Sinhalese

policemen have since applied for a transfer from Batticaloa.

In Kalmunai, 18 policemen were abducted by the LTTE on 15 May and were released the next day. Two days later five police were taken to an office on Bar Road and attacked by armed men. They were released after 48 hours. In mid-May 13 policemen from Sammanthurai were taken by armed men to a camp at Malwatte and tortured. They were later released and hospitalised, occasioning questions in Parliament. A few days later, People's Front Kalmunai chairman, M Sadambawa was shot dead.

Conflicting rumours in Colombo say police doctors are under orders to screen out Tiger nominees for the North-East police force on medical pretexts. There are 6,000 new recruits so far for the North-East force.

But the killings continue. Suthakaran was shot dead in Thambiluvil on 4 May and G Thangathurai killed in Pullumalai a few days later. A TELO cadre, K. Nadesanathapillai, was abducted in Kaluthavalai and A.L. Zailabdeen shot dead on 14 May.

Over 15,000 fishermen in Batticaloa and Amparai have been hit by a Health Department fishing ban, after a mystery fish disease was discovered in catches in the area.

Rough justice in Jaffna

IN JAFFNA, the relief local people felt after the IPKF withdrawal has gradually turned to uncertainty and fear. The killing of a Tellipalai man, Kanthasamy, accused of murder by the LTTE, who tied him to a lamp post and shot him in public on 17 May, has increased foreboding over the arbitrary nature of LTTE justice. People fear a return to the years when "lamp post killings" were routinely used by feuding militants to enforce submission or loyalty.

Despite the Tigers' iron grip on law and order, a series of hold-ups hit Vadamaratchy where houses, two temples, the Timber Corporation and the Cooperative Society were robbed this month. The Murugan temple at Karnavai South met a similar fate on 10 May. The disappearance of Rs 200,000 worth of railway lines from Jaffna station, a generator from Pannai Telecommunications office and lorry loads of cement, suggest the LTTE is fortifying major bases in jungle areas. There were also robberies and a series of low-level clashes between LTTE and PLOTE cadres at Poovarasankulam near Vavuniya.

After initial improvements, civil administration and transport remain minimal and there is a growing fuel and timber shortage which hampers reconstruction work. The two daily Jaffna-Colombo trains overflow with people, many of whom travel to the capital to phone their relatives abroad, since Jaffna still has no international lines. Inevitably there are tensions. Reserve

Police Officer Jaytissa was shot dead on the Colombo train on 30 May. The LTTE quickly intervened to protect police and army personnel.

Three Danish engineers arrived in the North-East in early May to plan a new telecommunications system costing \$200 million donated by Scandinavian countries. But there are already fears that when Jaffna's telephones are on line, people will have nothing to say.

Civil rights: principles and practice

SRI LANKA's Civil Rights Movement (CRM) has published a set of principles to prevent extra-legal executions which were endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly last December. CRM draws the Government's attention to detailed proposals for prevention and investigation of summary executions and calls on Sri Lanka to sign the UN Torture Convention. Among the recommendations mooted are that security personnel should defy orders to commit extra-judicial killings and that inter-Governmental mechanisms should be used to investigate offender countries.

Amnesty International, who similarly petitioned the LTTE on 30 May, asks that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) be admitted to detention centres in the North-East where the Tigers are said to be holding over 800 EPRLF "sympathisers".

ICRC are already concerned over

conditions for JVP detainees being held in the South. Many show signs of beatings and are undernourished. Chief Justice Parinda Ranasinghe has received 166 petitions in the last few months from youths held in Boosa, Hardy Technical College Ampara, Hingurakgoda Camp, Gangodawila and the Youth Development Centre Mahiyangana. One petition on behalf of 2,500 inmates at Boosa seeks the Chief Justice's intervention to provide them with adequate food, personal safety and legal rights.

CRM has also delivered a swingeing attack on Section 16 of Sri Lanka's infamous Press Council Law invoked by the Government this month to protect the confidentiality of Cabinet proceedings. *Sunday Times* editor Vijitha Yapa was forced to resign in early May after one of his *Suranimala* columns cast aspersions on the loyalty of a Cabinet Minister.

THE SOUTH

Robbery replaces revolution in the JVP handbook

THE SOUTHERN insurgent People's Liberation Front (JVP) resurfaced during May, with a press statement from "Acting President" Somawansa Amarsinghe, welcoming the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force.

Amarasinghe was rumoured to be in police custody last September, just prior to the Government's big push against the JVP and the killing in custody of rebel leaders Wijeweera and Gamanayake in November. Amarasinghe is third in the JVP hierarchy as well as Housing Minister Sirisena Cooray's brother-in-law, which led to questions in Parliament on 18 May about the exact nature of their relationship.

At the end of May, 205 JVP suspects had given themselves up in the six weeks that the new independent Surrender Committees had been functioning. There are now 7,628 detainees and a further 4,459 under rehabilitation. Almost 2,000 weapons have been surrendered of the 6,000 distributed to politicians and public servants during the JVP insurgency.

Police continue to report high-profile successes with the killing in mid-May of two JVP hit squads responsible for the deaths of broadcaster Premakirithi de

Alwis and Dr Gladys Jayewardene. Two other JVP leaders captured have confessed to over 200 murders. Another JVP member accused of 38 killings in the Urubokke area of Matara District was shot dead by police on 18 May.

Large amounts of arms and ammunition were recovered by security forces in operations in Hambantota and Kohagala in mid-May. Army sources say counter-insurgency operations will now be reduced with a new emphasis on training.

While overt JVP actions have diminished, robbery and violence continue unabated, perpetuated it is said by criminals, security forces and JVP alike. After 20 armed men robbed tourists at Sigiriya Village Hotel of valuables worth \$25,000 on 4 May, police launched a massive hunt in the Matale area, detaining 150 people. Polawatta Prematilleke, said to be an area leader of the JVP's military wing and the architect of the robbery, was shot dead by the Special Task Force in the Puswellagulla jungles on 9 May. Four days earlier a Sri Lanka Air Force helicopter taking part in the operation crashed near Habarana killing the six occupants.

On 8 May, a time bomb exploded near Wellawatte police station in Colombo.

No-one was injured. The same day in Kandy, Peradeniya University lecturers Sanath Amaratunge and BL Gunatilleka were abducted by unknown persons and released after 48 hours. Police arrested a student, MM Gunaratne, in Wellawaya with a pistol in his possession. They say he is a JVP cadre trained by EPRLF. Students at Panamura High School near Embilipitiya were arrested after JVP posters appeared in the area in early May.

The Government says it will launch a new Police Mobile Service from next month to combat the growing crime wave. Senior officers will tour remote areas to reorganise policing on a more efficient and accountable basis. The move is an attempt to rejuvenate the organising principles of Sri Lankan society as reflected by "the police, the temple and the school", a slogan made famous in a speech by Mr Premadasa earlier this year, counselling obedience to authority.

President Premadasa also told Government officers in Kandy on 26 May that after new laws were passed, those found guilty of corruption and waste in public life would be deprived of their civil rights. He clearly intends to use the stick as well as the carrot.

British Airways "kidnaps" Tamil asylum seekers

BRITISH AIRWAYS (BA) has been accused of "kidnapping" three Tamil asylum-seekers on arrival at Heathrow and forcibly deporting them to avoid punitive fines for passengers travelling with illegal documents.

The three men arrived on 9 April and were detained by BA after questions about their documents in Rome. After two hours, despite pleas to be allowed access to immigration authorities and to claim political asylum, they were returned to Rome. Italian police put them on a flight to Bombay where two of the three were badly beaten by Indian officials and returned to Colombo.

One of the three, Vasudeva Krishnan, managed to alert relatives by phone before he left London. Refugee authorities say their removal was clearly illegal and plan to mount a campaign to protect the rights of asylum seekers arriving in Britain. The Home Office has refused to condemn the incident.

Since the Carriers Liability Act of

1987, airlines are fined £1,000 for every passenger travelling on illegal documents even if it is subsequently proved that false papers were a refugee's only means of

escape. BA has been fined £3.5 million - £379,000 in the last three months - and has petitioned the Home Office for an amnesty over their failure to pay.

Some 564 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers arrived in Britain in the first three months of this year. Only three cases have been examined and there is a backlog of 1,812. Observers say immigration authorities are postponing decisions in the hope of improving conditions in Sri Lanka.

In Holland, three Tamil asylum-seekers were deported on 25 May after losing a legal appeal. There are three others in detention at Schiphol airport who may be deported in the next month. Over 400 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers arrived in Holland in January and February and legal sources say a return to a hard-line deportation policy is imminent. Of 8,000 asylum-seekers who arrived in Switzerland in the first four months of this year, over 1,000 are Sri Lankan and Swiss authorities will introduce a tough new asylum law in 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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