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Sri Lanka rebuffs UN peace approach

THE Sri Lankan government rejected a new peace plan by four Nobel laureates on behalf of the Canada-based World Council for Global Cooperation (WCGC) in early August.

The peace plan by Ilya Prigogine of Belgium, Mairead Maguire of Britain, Jan Tinbergen of Netherlands and George Weld of the US calls for a ceasefire verified by the UN, establishment of buffer zones, the adoption of federalism and UN-observed elections in the North-East. In a letter to the WCGC the Sri Lankan government has stressed that the conflict is an internal terrorist problem and maintains that peace efforts are continuing through the Parliamentary Select Committee which observers say has now become defunct.

Delegates attending an international conference on "Democracy and Displacement" in Colombo in mid-August also urged the Sri Lankan government to resolve the basic problems for the ethnic conflict and seek UN mediation. The government had earlier refused permission for the UN Secretary General's Special Representative on Internally Displaced Persons, Francis Deng to attend the conference.

The UN saga continued when Sri Lankan diplomats panicked over a hard-hitting resolution about to be tabled before the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities by four Western nations calling upon the Sri Lankan government and other parties to seek a cessation of hostilities and obtain the assistance of the UN Secretary General. After frantic diplomatic effort the resolution was withdrawn, but a great deal of dust had been kicked up over fears of UN intervention.

International refugee agency UNHCR is also caught up in the dust storm of controversy over UN involvement in Sri Lanka. UNHCR had been attempting to enter into agreements with the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Sea Tigers destroy naval vessels

Eelam (LTTE) to open a humanitarian corridor to the besieged Jaffna peninsula through the north-west Pooneryn crossing.

Following the publication of details of an impending agreement between the government and UNHCR in the Colombo newspaper *The Island* and allegations of government approval for an UNHCR-LTTE pact, SLFP leader Srimavo Bandaranaike accused UNHCR of dabbling with political issues and demanded full disclosure. She claimed that the agreement conceded a separate identity for Jaffna virtually excising the peninsula from the sovereign state of Sri Lanka. Others alleged that the proposed agreement between UNHCR and LTTE will confer the necessary legal status on the militant group. Perplexed UNHCR officials have denied that any agreement has been concluded. Some observers say that in terms of both UN intervention and the Pooneryn debacle, it is clear that the government will not sign any agreement that offers even a tacit recognition to the LTTE, while others claim the LTTE is actively seeking to internationalise the Sri Lankan conflict and perhaps UN intervention to gain recognition. Any kind of recognition of the LTTE by governments has almost become impossible following the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. *Island* columnist *Taraki* says the LTTE may have already achieved de facto sovereignty and now it is only a matter of sitting it out.

While debates raged in Colombo, LTTE's navy, the Sea Tigers, launched devastating attacks on the Sri Lankan Navy in the north. LTTE has strengthened its security following attacks by the Navy on civilians crossing the Kilali lagoon. Two Sri Lankan boats from Nagathevanthurai naval base east of Pooneryn crossing were destroyed in the Kilali lagoon by the Sea Tigers on 26

August, killing nine sailors and injuring five others. Another boat was captured by the LTTE. Three days later Sea Tigers

rammed a boat laden with explosives into an Israeli-made *Dvora* naval vessel near Point Pedro in the Jaffna peninsula killing another 12 sailors including four officers. The loss of the vessels, estimated at Rs 330 million (US \$8 million) has depleted morale among the security forces in the north and the government is increasingly concerned over the power of the Sea Tigers, according to analysts.

The security forces responded by imposing curfew in Jaffna and Kilinochchi districts and launching military operations within the Jaffna peninsula in late August. Defence sources say five LTTE boats were destroyed and 15 Tigers killed. President Wijetunge issued a decree prohibiting movement of boats in the northern sea between Mannar Island and Trincomalee. As the naval drama continued, peace initiatives had clearly taken a back seat.

Tourism Minister S Thondaman was the centre of controversy when he addressed expatriate Tamils in London on 13 August. While emphasising the need for unity Mr Thondaman urged more support for the LTTE which would eventually strengthen the bargaining power of the Tamils.

On his return to the island after meeting Tiger representative Lawrence Thilagar in Paris, Mr Thondaman was involved in further controversy when he told Colombo newspaper *Virakesari* that there could be peace only when the Sri Lankan government and the Army realised the determination of the Tamils. He said, however, peace efforts would be continued and he was ready to visit Jaffna for talks with the LTTE.

A proposal for an interim council for the North-East by Parliament Speaker MH Mohamed in August gained the support of the Tamil political parties. But according to Constitutional Affairs Minister KN Choksy such a council would be contrary to the Constitution.

Observers say hostility to external mediation on the basis of sovereignty is shortsighted, given the lack of internal initiatives that could work towards peace.

President Wijetunge reshuffled the Cabinet on 12 August, appointing ACS Hameed as Foreign Affairs Minister and Harold Herath as Minister of Justice. Tyrone Fernando entered the Cabinet as Minister of Information and MCM Aboosally became Labour Minister.

JAFFNA

Civilians die in air attacks

JAFFNA MP Mavai Senathirajah demanded an end to the bombing of Jaffna in a cable message to President Wijetunge in early September. Bombing and shelling of populated areas has led to many civilian deaths and damage to property, Mr Senathirajah says.

Aerial attacks and shelling were intensified after Sea Tiger encounters with the Sri Lankan Navy on 26 September. Earlier in the month the Selvachannathy temple in Thondamanaru was shelled from the Palaly Army camp during the annual festival killing two devotees and injuring many others.

Curfew was imposed in Jaffna and Kilinochchi districts on 27 August and military operations were launched from Army-occupied areas of Pooneryn, Elephant Pass and Mathagal in the Jaffna peninsula. Defence sources say troops advancing from Mathagal south-west to Sulipuram faced stiff resistance and a soldier and ten Tigers including three senior cadre died in clashes. The following day Iyakachchi, north of Elephant Pass came under heavy air attack and civilians fled the area. A soldier was killed and six others injured in attacks by the LTTE.

On 30 August the Jaffna town and northern areas of the peninsula were shelled from Mandaitivu, Palaly and Karaitivu military camps killing two civilians. Kilali also came under attack from the Pooneryn camp and three more civilians died. The following day a woman was killed and nine others injured when Airforce planes bombed Kondavil.

Despite naval attacks and civilian deaths people continued to cross the lagoon at Kilali, the last exit from the Jaffna peninsula, protected by LTTE boats. Nine civilians who went missing

after a clash between Sea Tigers and the Navy on 29 July are currently detained at the Palaly Army camp. A boat packed with civilians crossing the lagoon on 10 August capsized when passengers panicked after a shell exploded nearby. Seventeen people including three children drowned.

As military operations hardened attitudes, an agreement for the release of the 30 policemen held by the LTTE failed to materialise despite the shuttle diplomacy by Jaffna Government Agent (GA) K Manickavasagar. The parents of the prisoners who had stayed in Jaffna for 54 days in the hope of securing their release, returned to Colombo on 12 August after LTTE leader *Karikalan* told them that they should leave. The prisoners ended their fast soon after. The parents are bitter and say they have been deceived by the government and the LTTE.

Civilians in Jaffna continue to bear the brunt of the war. In mid-August the JOC informed the Jaffna GA that the supply of kerosene would be reduced to 1,500 barrels from 5,000 barrels. Each of the 200,000 families within the peninsula received one litre of kerosene per month. People say the reduction will not only affect home needs, but drastically curtail agricultural activity. There are no irrigation tanks in Jaffna and farmers are entirely dependent on wells and kerosene is needed for water pumps. The continuing economic blockade and rapid rise in the price of vegetables and other essential goods have added to the agony of the people.

In late August three sisters at Karaveddy in the Vadamaratchy area ate poisonous seeds because of poverty. Pichayappah Rathivathani, 24, died and the others were admitted to the hospital.

Blocked

Officers of the Wild Life Conservation Department say elephants are destroying crops in the east and north-west because their migratory paths have been blocked by the north-east war. In Habarana in the Anuradhapura District alone 65 elephants were killed in the last five months by farmers and ivory hunters. According to the Department 40,000 hectares of forest is destroyed in Sri Lanka each year.

Appointed

A new 18-member Parliamentary Select Committee headed by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe was appointed on 3 August to review the 1978 Republican Constitution. The terms of the Presidential Commission on Disappearances was extended by President Wijetunge on 23 August upto 10 January 1995. The Presidential Commission on NGOs ended its public sittings on 13 August, but will continue to function till December to consider documents and written submissions.

Denied

The Panadura High Court rescinded on 16 August its earlier order directing the police to produce Upcountry People's Front (UPF) leader Periyasamy Chandrasekaran before the Central Provincial Council to enable him to take oaths as councillor. Chandrasekaran was elected to the Council at the local elections held in May. He is in detention for the last two years accused of harbouring LTTE bomber Varatharajan who blew up the Army headquarters in Colombo in 1991. His trial began on 17 June. The trials of two other officers of the UPF also continue.

Hindu headquarters bombed

A bomb explosion ripped through the Tamil Nadu headquarters of the right-wing Hindu Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) in Madras on 8 August killing eleven people and injuring many others. In violence that followed two Muslims were killed at Coimbatore in east Tamil Nadu as mobs ran amok attacking Muslim-owned shops.

Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party leader SK Advani accused Pakistan of involvement and said that Indian Muslims spying for Pakistan were assisted by the LTTE. Tamil Nadu police arrested Palani

Baba, a Muslim fundamentalist, said to be closely linked to the Tigers.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalitha was accused by ruling Congress (I) MPs of threatening to secede after she said New Delhi's river water policy would endanger India's unity. Jayalalitha's AIADMK party MPs voted against Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in the crucial vote of confidence in Parliament in July despite New Delhi's promise of appropriate action in sharing water resources between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka states. Observers say Congress (I) is

awaiting the results of two crucial by-elections in Tamil Nadu before contemplating any action against Jayalalitha.

As the trial in the Rajiv Gandhi murder case continued in Madras, Indian Navy Commander Ramdas said LTTE infiltration into Tamil Nadu had been successfully prevented. R Sivalingam, a Sri Lankan activist was arrested by police in August on allegations of LTTE links. Sources say that he fell out with the Collector of Coimbatore after campaigning for better conditions for Hill Country repatriates from Sri Lanka.

■ Death squads return to Trincomalee

Task Force takes Batticaloa

THE much-feared Special Task Force (STF) extended its operations 16 miles into the Batticaloa District from the Amparai border in August, as the Sri Lankan government decided to postpone local elections in the east scheduled for October to February next year. Tamil MPs who oppose elections in the uncertain atmosphere say 70% of the territory in the east is outside Army control.

Amidst conflicting claims by the Army that the LTTE has been driven out of the east and Tiger units were preparing for a major offensive, nine new STF camps were established in Batticaloa District. Local Army Commander Brigadier Rohan Gunaratne has allowed shops to be open till 8pm in Batticaloa town and after 36 months cinemas were

permitted night shows.

Reports say Kaluvanchikudy Assistant Government Agent S Amalanathan was abducted by the LTTE on 3 August demanding a ransom of Rs 5 million. Following appeals by the family he was later released. In mid-August the Army shot and injured a fisherman in the Batticaloa lagoon and killed 16 year-old S Ratnasingham at Santhiveli near Valaichenai. JOC says LTTE leader *Nithyanandan* was killed in an ambush on 14 August and four Tigers were shot dead at Ralaikulam.

An opposition team visiting Batticaloa in early August found that refugee camps had not been repaired for many months and 163 families in Mandur had no toilet or health facilities. Batticaloa District is

in the grip of a severe drought and the Health Department says over 10,000 cases of malaria have been detected in the last seven months in Manmunai and Pattipalai areas. A new survey says that Rs 7.5 billion (\$160 million) worth property has been damaged in Batticaloa District since June 1990 and 105,000 acres of land remains uncultivated. According to the survey 3,012 boats, 5,542 houses, 2,070 government buildings and 784 business centres have been damaged.

Further north in Trincomalee, fear reigned after Tharmapalan and his son Thayaparan were abducted on 6 August by armed men in a white van, a hallmark of Army death squads. The following day the LTTE shot dead six policemen at Sambaltivu. Three days later the body of Provincial Council employee J Jeyadas was found in the same area. In search operations in mid-August in and around Trincomalee town, a large number of people were arrested after being identified by masked informers.

Refugees returning from India found that some of their houses had been demolished by the Trincomalee Town Council to build living quarters for Council employees and others occupied. Reports say relief and rehabilitation has almost come to a standstill in Trincomalee because of a funding crisis. The government owes the local cooperative Rs 40.8 million (\$850,000) for food supplied to refugees.

The first hundred days

THE honeymoon seems to be over for new President DB Wijetunge after 100 days in office. There is talk of a power vacuum at the top and the administration no longer talks with one voice as it did under President Premadasa's iron grip. As one commentator put it "Old brooms sweep the old way". Now that the task of undoing the former president's deeds is almost over, long-standing problems are looming and questions are being raised about his ability to lead the nation.

As if to remind the people who is in charge, President Wijetunge rapped the Army over the Janakapura debacle and told the troops to "sleep by day and move by night rather than move by day and sleep by night". His claim that there is no ethnic problem in the country has put the Tamil parties in an angry mood. The general view within and outside Sri Lanka that he will not be able to deliver seems to gain ground.

While President Wijetunge made his claims 10,000 Sinhalese youths queued outside 23 recruitment centres in Colombo to join the Army. In mid-August 35 young Tamil women were arrested in the city and interrogated. Over 1,000 Tamils were rounded up in mid-night operations a week later and 150 were detained for further questioning. In Uva four Tamil students and a teacher were arrested. Hill Country MP and CWC Vice President TV Sennan warned of dire consequences if arrests continued.

A body burned with tyres, a hallmark of death squads, was found in Mattakuliya on 23 August. A note nearby said that the dead person was a Tiger named *Ravindran* involved in the murder of President Premadasa. In late August LTTE member *Nixon* was arrested in Colombo. Members of the Special Investigation Team probing the Rajiv Gandhi murder in Tamil Nadu flew in to Colombo to interview *Nixon*.

Mannar retreat

THE Army withdrew from a 20-mile heavily-fortified front on the western bank of Giant's Tank in mainland Mannar on 14 August and retreated to the coastal Vankalai and Thallady camps. The surprise move effectively gives the LTTE control of vast strategically valuable territory in Mannar District, observers say.

Army officers claim the pull out is tactical, but analysts believe that it has become increasingly difficult to hold the territory, particularly in view of the ability of the LTTE to launch attacks from jungle bases in the east and the infiltration of the Mannar Island on the west.

Grama Sevakas (village headmen) who have been ordered by the police to compile particulars of all residents in Mannar District, complain that the police are forcibly taking building materials from houses to construct bunkers.

Following talks between church leaders and the new Mannar Army commander, 251 people in Army-controlled areas were granted permission to attend the annual festival of Madhu church, the most-sacred Catholic shrine in the island, on 15 August.

In Vavuniya, the Army announced in early August that passengers from the north should retain the permits issued at Thandikulam on their return journeys. People complained that chemical shortages in Vavuniya hospital for blood tests forced them to go to private laboratories for tests, particularly for malaria.

Two boys were seriously wounded in late August when they played with a bomb they had found in a dried well. The LTTE attacked an Army post at Tantrimalai near the Vavuniya-Anuradhapura border on 24 August killing a soldier.

ASIA WATCH CALLS FOR HALT TO REFUGEE REPATRIATION FROM TAMIL NADU

Return to uncertainty

USA-BASED human rights agency *Asia Watch*, in a report released on 11 August has called on both the governments of Sri Lanka and India to halt the repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees from the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, unless there are firm guarantees that refugees were returning voluntarily. *Asia Watch* also sought assurance that refugees were sufficiently aware of the conflict and that they would not be subjected to persecution on return.

As former Indian Supreme Court judge Krishna Iyer announced a fast to stop the repatriation in mid-August, refugee and human rights agencies based in India said the refugees in Tamil Nadu are being coerced to return and have no opportunity of receiving authentic information on the situation in their home areas.

Despite these concerns the UNHCR-monitored return of Tamil refugees recommenced on 13 August. The repatriation began in January last year and over 29,000 refugees were returned before the programme was suspended in October. In the current repatriation over 5,000 refugees arrived in Trincomalee by the ship MV Nicobar and according to Indian rehabilitation officers the programme will be suspended in early September until January 1994. According to UNHCR 6,848 persons have volunteered to return to Sri Lanka. However, reports indicate that there has been coercion on a large-scale forcing refugees to leave India.

The Tamil Nadu government order banning NGOs into refugee camps remains in force. Earlier, NGOs supplemented government assistance by involvement in education, training, counselling, medical assistance and improvement of accommodation. Refugees are allowed to go out of the camp only between 8am and 6pm. UNHCR is continuing to be deprived access to refugee camps.

Refugee agencies say since the ban on NGOs, camp conditions have deteriorated and restriction on movement has deprived refugees of employment opportunities. Reports indicate that medical provisions are inadequate and several refugees have been arrested without assigning reasons and detained in sub-jails or prison camps without access to courts.

Assistance to camp refugees are delayed deliberately. According to local NGOs payment to refugees in Periyar Nagar camp in Maduari due on 1 August was not made until a refugee died of starvation and other refugees began demonstrating. In some camps refugees were given an ultimatum. Eleven refugee fami-

"We boarded the ship in fear for our lives. But we are going to die of starvation. We did not expect such cruelty"

lies at Thapathi in Chidampananar District were told that they should leave the camp if they did not volunteer for repatriation by 15 August. Refugees in Avinasi, Pooluvapatti and Aliyar Nagar camps in Coimbatore District were ordered to "volunteer" for repatriation before 9 September.

Rehabilitation officers had been instructed, according to reports, to gather by whatever means, the targeted number of refugees for repatriation. Officers accompanied by police armed with batons visited Paramathi camp in Salem District and told refugees that they must prepare to leave. NGOs say refugees are brought to Madras for repatriation from various camps in Tamil Nadu without proper planning and arrangement for their food or accommodation. They are forced to

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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stay in buses and most are not allowed to speak to UNHCR officials.

SC Chandrahasan of Madras-based humanitarian organisation ProTEG says the unsatisfactory role of UNHCR is causing problems and complications. Incidents of coercion have been brought to the notice of UNHCR's Madras and Delhi offices and High Commissioner Mrs Sadako Ogata by ProTEG. According to Mr Chandrahasan UNHCR is understaffed and is able to interview only a few refugees. Reports say UNHCR assisted some families who did not wish to board the ship to return to camps.

On arrival in Trincomalee, the first batch of refugees were packed like sardines into four railway carriages and sent to Vavuniya. The Asikulam and Vepamkulam camps in Vavuniya have become overcrowded and are being extended. The local cooperative stores suspended food supply to the two camps after the Sri Lankan government failed to pay Rs 6.5 million (\$135,000). The camps did not receive food for 24 days and some persons became unconscious. Refugees were in tears and said, "We boarded the ship in fear for our lives. But we are going to die of starvation. We did not expect such cruelty". UNHCR was forced to protest and the food supply was restored after the Government Agent agreed to pay Rs 2 million to traders providing food to the cooperative stores.

In Trincomalee, according to Tamil MP Suresh Premachandran, refugees have not been allowed by the Army to return to home areas. Arriving refugees are checked first by customs officers and then by police causing considerable delay. On arrival in Vavuniya, refugees are first interrogated by the Army at the railway station.

Police surrounded the hotel where returning refugees are accommodated at Uppuveli in Trincomalee District on 7 September and began checking belongings of the refugees, despite protests by UNHCR. Police officers claimed that the search was to ensure security following intelligence reports. Four days earlier refugee returnee 16 year-old Ramesh was abducted from the Uppuveli hotel by an armed Tamil group allied to the Army. Following protests the Tamil group has issued a letter to UNHCR confirming that Ramesh is in their custody.