

## **Sri Lanka Project Briefing**

### **20 February 2004**



This briefing is further to the briefings published in November and December 2003, which are available on the Refugee Council website at [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk).

## **Peace at risk as President dissolves Parliament**

### **Dissolution of Parliament**

As the clock struck midnight on 7 February 2004, Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunge dealt another blow to the peace process by dissolving Parliament and announcing new elections for 2 April. In the normal course of events, the six-year term of Parliament would have ended only on 5 December 2007. The President's mid-night proclamation by gazette notification, fixed nominations for the period between 17 and 24 February. The April election will be the third since October 2000.

The President's party, the People's Alliance (PA) was in government since August 1994 and in the October 2000 general elections, the PA was returned to power, winning 107 seats in Parliament and gaining 45.1% of the votes while the opposition United National Party (UNP) secured only 89 seats with 40.2% of the votes. The People's Liberation Front (JVP) won 10 seats with 6% of the votes. The PA formed the government with the support of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), the Muslim National Unity Alliance (NUA), the Tamil group Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and the Hill Country's Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC). The President dissolved Parliament in December 2001, after several MPs of the PA, SLMC and CWC defected to the opposition and the PA lost its majority in the 225-member legislature.

In general elections held in December 2001, the United National Front (UNF), whose main constituent is the UNP, gained 109 seats with 45.6% of the votes. The PA won only 77 seats with 37.2% of the votes. The JVP increased its seats to 16 with 9.1% of the votes. The UNF formed the government with the support of the SLMC, CWC and Up Country People's Front (UPF). The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) contested separately and won 15 seats in the north-east.

UNF spokesman GL Peiris condemned the 7 February dissolution of Parliament as an unprecedented and undemocratic act. He said that nowhere in the world a government holding the confidence of the majority in Parliament had been dismissed and accused President Chandrika of willing to sacrifice anything for power. In November 2003, the President took over the ministries of Defence, Interior, and Mass Communications from the control of the UNF government. She also appointed new heads for the state radio and television networks. The PA signed an agreement of co-operation with the JVP on 20 January 2004. These were widely seen as indicators of the President's intention to dissolve Parliament.

Under the Constitution, the President has the power to dissolve Parliament after one year of a general election. But the President wrote to the Speaker of Parliament in August 2002, pledging that she would not dissolve Parliament unless the UNF government loses its majority or in case of imminent danger to the unity of the nation.

### **President sacks ministers**

President Chandrika also sacked all 27 non-Cabinet ministers and 12 deputy ministers on 11 February.<sup>1</sup> This included non-cabinet ministers Jayalath Jayawardena and Noordeen Mashoor and T Maheswaran who handled work relating to rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (IDP). The following day, Cabinet spokesman GL Peiris described the act as a flagrant violation of the Constitution, which provides for continuity of government after dissolution of Parliament. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe accused the President of seriously jeopardizing the peace process by the removal of some ministers. Non-Cabinet Economic Reform minister Milinda Moragoda, who resigned before he was removed, was a member of the peace negotiating team and was in charge of generating funds for reconstruction of the north-east. The President also ordered secretaries of ministries to take back state property from the sacked ministers, such as vehicles, computers and fax machines, to prevent their use in the election campaign.

PA stalwart Mangala Samaraweera presented complaints of corruption to the Bribery and Corruption Commission on 12 February against 17 UNF ministers, including Finance minister KN Choksy and Western Region Development minister MH Mohamed. The next day, the President suspended all government appointments and promotions and on 16 February sacked Christian Affairs minister John Amaratunge<sup>2</sup> for the alleged reason that he failed to take oaths as a minister in her presence. She also withdrew the bodyguards of the 39 non-Cabinet and deputy ministers who were dismissed earlier.

### **New ministers**

Following the dissolution Parliament, the President appointed two of her party members as ministers in the caretaker Cabinet without any discussion with the Prime Minister. The appointment of Lakshman Kadirgamar as Minister of Information and Daily Communication and DM Jayaratne as Minister of Posts and Mass Communication appears to ensure control of the state media in the run-up to the elections. Outlining his media policy, Mr Kadirgamar said on 10 February that the government cannot use the state media as it pleases and that the state media should help to project views from the widest cross section of the people facilitating debate on strengthening transparency, good governance and law and order.

On 16 February, Mr Kadirgamar cancelled the TV channel license of the private company Asian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), obtained in 1995. The ABC, which currently operates five radio channels, challenged the decision in the Court of Appeal. In an interim order, the court ruled that ABC's licence and frequency should not be

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<sup>1</sup> There were 32 Cabinet ministers, 27 non-Cabinet ministers and 12 deputy ministers in the UNF administration.

<sup>2</sup> John Amaratunge was also Interior Minister and President Chandrika took away the Interior Ministry from him on 4 November 2003.



assigned to any other company until a final decision. French media agency Reporters Sans Frontieres has expressed fear that Kadirgamar's decision could be a prelude to further tough measures against the private media.

### **Extension of President's term**

The President revealed in December 2003 that she took oaths twice after presidential elections in 1999. The President's term of office would have expired in December 2005. The second oath effectively extends her term up to 11 November 2006. The second swearing-in ceremony was held in secret, in the presence of Chief Justice Sarath Silva. Colombo newspaper *Daily Mirror* (29 December 2003) says that the Chief Justice confirmed on 28 December that the President took the oaths twice. According to Colombo's *Sunday Times* (21 December 2003), the first swearing-in took place on 22 December 1999 and the second on 11 November 2000.

### **Election alliance**

The Tamil party Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) has already indicated support for the PA while the Sinhalese nationalist party Sihala Urumaya has announced that it will not join any alliance. The EPDP is attempting form an alliance with the Shanker faction of the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) and the Varadar faction of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF). The SLMC says that, unlike the last election, it will contest separately in 13 districts and not in coalition with the UNF. But the Muslim party continues to hold discussions with the UNF. SLMC leader Rauf Hakeem says that he will offer support to any major party that accepts the demands such as, a separate devolutionary Muslim unit in the Eastern Province and participation of a separate SLMC delegation in the peace talks. Reports say an SLMC breakaway group led by ALM Athaullah has joined the SLFP-JVP alliance. The Hill Country party, the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) says it will continue to extend support to the UNF, particularly for introducing legislation in 2003 to grant citizenship to stateless Hill Country Tamils. The CWC candidates will contest on the UNF ticket.

A hung Parliament again is predicted and in such an eventuality the UNF would expect the support of the TNA - a coalition of four Tamil parties<sup>3</sup> - and the SLMC. When it was formed on 20 October 2001, the TNA accepted the leading role of the LTTE and demanded that the government should hold peace talks only with the LTTE. Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) President V Anandasangari, however, has continually stressed that his party should maintain its independence and should not be dictated to by the Tigers. The other TULF members, including general secretary R Sambanthan and Batticaloa MP Joseph Pararajasingham have criticized Mr Anandasangari, arguing that Tamil unity is more important at this crucial stage in Tamil history than party politics. An attempt to sack Mr Anandasangari was prevented by courts.

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<sup>3</sup> TNA is composed of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the Selvam Faction of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) and Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO).

The members of the TNA have been meeting to agree on an election symbol. They would like to use the popular 'Rising Sun' which is the symbol of the TULF.<sup>4</sup> But the attempt has been thwarted by Mr Anandasangari who obtained a court order on 11 February, preventing general secretary Sampanthan from convening any meeting of the TULF without his written consent. The court order will be in force until 16 March 2004. Other TULF members have filed an application in the Court of Appeal against this order. The TNA may use the 'House' symbol of the Federal Party (FP), which is a constituent of the TULF.

The Tigers have indicated that they will not field candidates, but fully support the TNA in the forthcoming elections.<sup>5</sup> The TNA leaders met LTTE's Thamilchelvan on 17 February in Kilinochchi. After the meeting, Mr Thamilchelvan said that it was decided to urge the Tamil people to vote for the TNA on the basis of a common policy, which would include the promotion of the right of the Tamil people to self-determination. A week earlier, sacked minister and UNP member T Maheswaran announced that he would not contest in the forthcoming elections. Mr. Maheswaran was elected on the UNF ticket in Jaffna in the December 2001 general elections. Observers believe that Mr Maheswaran may have been persuaded by the LTTE that Tamil unity will be compromised if he contested in the north-east on behalf of a southern Sinhalese party. In mid-February, the leader of the Up-Country People's Front (UPF), P Chandrasekaran and Western Province People's Front (WPPF) met Mr Thamilchelvan on 18 February in Kilinochchi. Mr Chandrasekaran said after the meeting that his party would contest jointly with the TNA in certain areas of the Hill Country.

### **Election results**

The UNF is expected to face a difficult election with escalating cost-of-living, continuing industrial unrest, rising crime and lack of results in the peace process. Observers believe that the UPFA will use the peace negotiations between the UNF and LTTE to maximum effect as an attempt to deprive the Sinhalese people of their sovereignty and independence.

If the UPFA wins the election, any progress in the peace process is unlikely and a return to violence is a distinct possibility as parties become increasingly frustrated. If UNF gains victory, it may not be able to take the peace process forward, with a more hostile and powerful President and a Supreme Court, which appears to be on her side.

### **Election violence**

The extreme violence that elections generate in Sri Lanka is now a major concern. In the run-up to and during the last two general elections in October 2000 and December 2001, there were 4,300 violent incidents, including 110 murders and 200 attempted murders. Many incidents of grievous hurt, assault, robbery, arson, threat and intimidation and attacks on election monitors were recorded by the Colombo agency the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV). Another Colombo agency,

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<sup>4</sup> The Rising Sun is the symbol of the Tamil nationalist Dravida Munnetra Kalagam party (DMK) in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu and was adopted by the TULF when it was formed in 1976.

<sup>5</sup> LTTE's People's Front of the Liberation Tigers (PFLT) is a registered political party.



People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) observed voter intimidation, impersonation and poll rigging.

Violence began even before nominations. According to the police, at Arachchikatuwa, 25 miles south of Puttalam, the house of PA regional council member Sanath Nishantha was attacked on 14 February and three of his supporters were wounded during a meeting related to elections. On the same day, at Katuneriya, ten miles north of Negombo, two persons were shot and injured in an attack on the house of a former People's Alliance MP.

LTTE military leader Col Karuna assured at a meeting on 11 February in Batticaloa with the head of SLMM Trond Furuhoide that the LTTE would not resort to violence or disrupt elections in any part of the island.

### **Election in north-east**

Some Tamil groups have expressed fear to contest in the north-east because of threats posed by the LTTE. The LTTE have access to Army-controlled areas under the ceasefire agreement of February 2002 and have established a number of political offices. The Tigers are suspected to be behind the murder of some 50 members of opposition groups since ceasefire began. The Tamil groups have called on the government and the international community to prevail on the LTTE to allow freedom of mobility into Tiger-controlled areas and the right to association.

Similar fears have been expressed regarding these Tamil groups and the government security forces. The Tamil party EPDP controls the islands west of the Jaffna peninsula, along with the armed forces, and concerns have been raised that other parties will not be able to campaign on these islands. In the 2001 general elections, the security forces prevented some 60,000 Tamils in LTTE-controlled areas of Vanni and Batticaloa from entering government-held areas to cast their votes. A large number of internal refugees have now returned home and according to estimates there are more than 230,000 voters in LTTE areas.<sup>6</sup>

The LTTE wants the SLMM to monitor the elections in the north-east, but the ceasefire monitoring body says that political elections do not fall within its mandate. The Elections Commissioner announced on 19 February that he would not permit polling stations in LTTE areas, even though northern Government Agents have expressed willingness to establish polling stations in these areas. The Commissioner says he made the decision because of security and transport problems. There were proposals for polling booths in the neutral zones between LTTE-controlled and government-held areas.<sup>7</sup> But the Commissioner also rejected this option because of landmine threats. Cluster polling stations will be established in Army-controlled areas, particularly near entry points to LTTE areas. Tamil political parties say that many people in the LTTE areas will not be able to vote because of long distances, damaged roads, lack of proper public transport and military checkpoints.

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<sup>6</sup> Batticaloa - 80,000; Trincomalee - 12,000; Jaffna - 6,000; Mullaitivu - 86,000; Kilinochchi - 50,000

<sup>7</sup> Article 1.4 of the February 2002 ceasefire agreement provides there should be a 600-metre zone of separation between the government armed forces and LTTE fighting formations.

## **SLFP-JVP agreement**

After many months of wrangling and despite ideological differences, PA's main constituent, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the JVP signed an agreement of co-operation on 20 January 2004 forming the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA). The JVP has long been opposed to any talks with the Tigers and has advocated a military solution. The SLFP believes that the Sri Lankan conflict could be solved through 'devolution of power', but the JVP says there should be only 'administrative decentralization' to the local authority and is opposed to devolution. This difference between the two parties has been written into the agreement.

The agreement says that the government-LTTE peace process has caused Sri Lanka to face the prospect of losing its territorial integrity and the establishment of a parallel Tamil state in the north-east. It accuses the UNF government of fostering international support for the formation of such a state, paying scant regard to the environment and introducing policies and legislation that have adversely affected the poor. The agreement also severely criticizes the LTTE for flagrant violation of the ceasefire agreement.

The SLFP-JVP agreement promises public accountability, transparency and good governance and pledges to implement the following Five Noble Objectives of Governance (*Pancha Maha Piliweth*):

- 1) Economy** - Encourage local industries and local production, lay emphasis on increased productivity in public and private sectors instead of selling off national assets, adopt global advances in technology and maximize foreign capital investment on the basis of mutual benefit and solve economic problems of the people by relief measures.
- 2) Ethnic harmony** - Guarantee equality, fundamental human and democratic rights without discrimination, combat separatism based on language and religion to preserve territorial integrity and sovereignty, find a solution to the ethnic problem 'through a correct dialogue with the LTTE and other relevant groups and communities'.
- 3) Strengthening democracy** - Formulate a new constitution abolishing executive presidency, strengthen sovereignty of Parliament, introduce a new electoral system which will reflect the wishes of the people and reform police and judiciary.
- 4) Cultural policy** - While safeguarding national identity and cultural heritage, use cultural influence from all over the world for growth of indigenous cultures, halt rapid erosion of social values and direct society towards cultural rejuvenation based on traditional values.
- 5) Foreign policy** - Ensure an independent foreign policy that will safeguard sovereignty of Sri Lanka and neighbouring states while maintaining friendship and goodwill and preserve and expand goodwill with neighbouring states in the spheres of political, economic and cultural relations.

The LTTE maintain that peace negotiations should be held only with them and describe the agreement as a threat to peace that may provoke war. The JVP and the



SLFP have questioned the role of Norway in the peace process and have held many demonstrations demanding the removal of the Norwegians and the Norwegian-led SLMM. After the agreement was signed, both parties said that Norway's role will be thoroughly reviewed and the ceasefire agreement will be re-negotiated. They also rejected the LTTE proposals for an interim administration in the north-east.

On 2 February 2004, four more parties, including the NUA and People's United Front (MEP), joined the UPFA. The leftist members of PA, the Community Party (CP) and the Lanka Equal Rights Party (LSSP) initially refused to join as they disagree with the policies of the JVP, particularly the denial of devolution of power as a solution to the ethnic conflict. But on 15 February, both parties announced that they would join the alliance, after President Chandrika assured that their concerns would receive attention. In recent years, the Marxist JVP has shown nationalistic tendency and chauvinistic propensity and may exercise great influence over the policies of the UPFA. The new alliance would no doubt be a stumbling block for the advancement of peace.

### **Peace process**

After taking over the three ministries in November 2003, the President has not been able to take forward the peace process. Sources say that attempts were made by the President's nominees to contact the LTTE, but have not produced any results. She has issued strict instructions to the military that the ceasefire must be observed. She even allowed the use of Airforce helicopters by LTTE's political leader SP Thamilselvan when he visited the Eastern Province. According to Colombo newspaper *Sunday Observer*,<sup>8</sup> she asked Prime Minister Wickremasinghe to continue the negotiations with the LTTE and proposed a Joint Peace Council to initiate the process. She said that she was agreeable to share a degree of power of the ministries of Defence, Interior and Media with the Prime Minister or a minister appointed by him. The power sharing would relate to dealings with the SLMM, Norwegian mediators, the ceasefire agreement and infrastructure development in the north-east. The President had also proposed a new Ministry of National Security or a portfolio of Minister Assisting Defence to involve the Prime Minister.

But Mr Wickremasinghe rejected the offers stressing that the control of the Defence Ministry was vital for peace negotiations. He was not against the President retaining the Defence Ministry, provided he was given substantive powers to continue the peace process and implement the ceasefire agreement. He also pointed out that the LTTE also had made it clear that the government must have control of the Defence Ministry if it wanted to take the peace process forward. As there was no breakthrough, the Prime Minister declared on 8 January that he was relinquishing all responsibilities relating to the ceasefire. If the President is firm on retaining the three ministries, then she must talk to the LTTE directly and renegotiate the ceasefire agreement, he said. The President had earlier maintained that the ceasefire agreement is flawed.

The Consensus Committee (the Mano-Malik Committee), which includes UNP chairman Malik Samarawickrama and presidential advisor Mano Tittawela, appointed in November 2003 to explore ways of co-operation between the PA and UNF, held discussions from 4 to 15 November. The Committee began negotiations again on the

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<sup>8</sup> *Sunday Observer* 21 December 2003



issue of sharing defence responsibilities on 23 January and continued until Parliament was dissolved on 7 February. Apparently there was no breakthrough.

The Tigers have expressed concern over the delay in peace negotiations caused by the power struggle in southern Sri Lanka. Mr Thamilmhelvan told *Reuters* on 13 January that the government and its military machine should ensure that the Tamil people are not pushed towards taking up arms again. He assured that the LTTE would not break the ceasefire.

## **Elections Commissioner**

Dayananda Dissanayake is the current Commissioner of Elections and observers allege that President Kumaratunge omitted to perform her constitutional duties in order to retain him in that position. The 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution<sup>9</sup> provides for the appointment of an independent Elections Commission composed of five members, for the purpose of conducting free and fair elections. The Constitutional Council recommends these members to the President.<sup>10</sup> On 25 November 2002, the Constitutional Council recommended five persons for appointment to the Election Commission and named former justice RM Dheeraratne as chairman. The President refused to appoint them, alleging that Mr Dheeraratne was a supporter of the Prime Minister's United National Party. The Constitutional Council thereafter investigated and found that there was no truth in the President's allegations and urged her to make the appointment. Up to the present, the President has not appointed the independent Election Commission but has extended the term of Mr Dissanayake.

Article 27 (2) of the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment says that the Elections Commissioner shall continue to exercise the powers of the Commission until the Election Commission is constituted. These powers include prohibiting the use of state property for election campaign.<sup>11</sup> The Commission is also empowered to call for police officers from the Inspector General of Police to assist fair elections and such police officers must act under the direction and control of the Commission.<sup>12</sup> It can also recommend to the President the deployment of the armed forces. Whether Mr Dissanayake, whose presence in the election scene has been ensured by the President, will impartially and effectively use these powers to ensure fair elections is yet to be seen.

UNP's deputy leader Karu Jayasuriya wrote to the Elections Commissioner complaining that since the dissolution of Parliament, the state media has begun a vilification campaign against the government and requested him to take action under the 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution which empowers him to issue guidelines on the conduct of the state media in the run-up to and during elections. In the event of contravention of the guidelines by any state medium, the Commissioner may appoint an authority to take over the part of the management that impinges on the election. The Commissioner appointed PAFFREL to monitor the state media. PAFFREL says

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<sup>9</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment came into force on 3 October 2001.

<sup>10</sup> The 10-member Constitutional Council consists of the Prime Minister, Parliament Speaker, Leader of the Opposition, a presidential appointee and representatives of political parties and minority groups.

<sup>11</sup> On 16 February, the Elections Commissioner issued a circular giving orders to all candidates and political parties not to use public property for election campaign.

<sup>12</sup> The Elections Commissioner has so far called for 50,000 police officers from Inspector General of Police Indra de Silva.



it will employ 20,000 election monitors. The Elections Commissioner has invited the Commonwealth, European Union, Association of Asian Election Authorities and Pakistan, Bangladesh and Philippines to send election monitors.

### **Defence Co-operation Agreement**

According to Indian press reports, India is concerned over the provision in LTTE's October 2003 proposals, which says that the ISGA should have control of marine and offshore installations and resources adjacent to the coastline of the north-east. Observers believe that the involvement of Indian retired military officers Lt. Gen. Satish Nambiar and Vice Admiral PJ Jacob in advising the Sri Lankan government stems from these concerns. Sri Lankan Army Commander Lt. Gen. Lionel Balagalla revealed, following a visit to India from 8 to 11 December, that a Defence Co-operation Agreement (DCA) will be signed between India and Sri Lanka. According to press reports, the DCA will allow links between regiments of the Sri Lankan and Indian armies, provision of Indian helicopters for Sri Lankan troop transport, repairs to the runway of the Palaly airbase in Jaffna, exchange of intelligence between the countries, joint patrols of the navies of both countries in the Indian ocean and training for Sri Lankan troops in India.

The LTTE have criticized the proposed the DCA. Tiger chief peace negotiator Anton Balasingham has told Norwegian negotiators that such an agreement might upset the 'balance of forces' to the disadvantage of the LTTE and would encourage the Sinhala political leadership to take a hard-line attitude towards the Tamils. The SLMM has always insisted on the 'balance of forces' between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the LTTE for the successful maintenance of the ceasefire. Mr Balasingham alleges that the agreement is part of the 'international safety net' set up by Mr Wickremasinghe's government to involve external forces. Following their exclusion from the US-sponsored donor conference in Washington in April 2003, the Tigers blamed the government of being pre-occupied with creating an 'international safety net' to pressurize them to accept a watered-down political solution as laid down by larger nations like the US and India. On 30 January 2004, the Sri Lankan government signed a defence pact with Russia.

### **The economy**

The economic recovery seen after the ceasefire agreement has been affected by the power struggle. The Sri Lankan Joint Business Forum says that the political crisis is undermining economic growth and warns that the country faced a major cash flow crisis because direct foreign investments and foreign aid flows have been seriously affected. The election will cost nearly Rs 1 billion (\$10 million). USAID has warned that foreign support will be jeopardized in the absence of political stability.

The growth rate for 2004 was forecast at 7-8%. The World Bank says the rate is now expected to be between 4% and 5%, due to the political instability by the take over of three government ministries by the President and the dissolution of Parliament.

## **Humanitarian issues**

According to UNHCR, 335,656 persons had returned to home areas in the north-east by the end of December 2003 and 4,610 returned from India. Currently there are 396,076 IDPs receiving assistance from the government - 93,630 in refugee camps and 302,446 with friends or relatives - nearly 80% in the north-east districts.

Progress in rehabilitation of IDPs and reconstruction has been badly affected by the suspension of peace talks and since dissolution of Parliament it appears that agony of the IDPs will be prolonged. The LTTE held a meeting with donor country representatives and international agencies in Kilinochchi on 19 January. Mr Thamilchelvan stated that as the donors had stipulated in the Tokyo Declaration that reconstruction assistance would depend on parallel and substantial progress in the peace process, they must now bring meaningful pressure on the government to resume peace talks. International donors pledged \$4.5 billion for reconstruction at the Tokyo conference in June 2003. In late January, Mr Thamilchelvan visited seven European nations for discussions with governments.

A Sri Lankan donor meeting, chaired by the US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, took place on 17 February in Washington. The co-chairs of the June 2003 Tokyo donor conference - the European Commission, Japan, Norway and the US - were represented. While expressing concern over suspension of peace talks and disappointment at the breakdown of co-habitation efforts between the President and the Prime Minister, the co-chairs reiterated their determination to implement the assistance pledged at the Tokyo conference based on the principles of the Tokyo Declaration. They, however, recognized that 'there are particularly urgent needs for assistance for people in the war-torn areas and throughout Sri Lanka'. The co-chairs called on all donors to continue delivering humanitarian relief and rehabilitation assistance to all needy areas of Sri Lanka. These donors are expected to meet again after the elections.

UNHCR's Ex-Com Chairman Jean-Marc Boulgaris says uncertainty associated with elections may adversely impact on the IDPs and their return home. He points out that refugees are concerned about security, including landmine threats, fear of children's safety and human rights violations. According to Refugees International, camp refugees in India do not want to return because there has been no political settlement, their homes lie in military HSZs or they fear LTTE recruitment of children.

## **Attacks on churches**

While people are worried about violence during elections, there is increasing concern over attacks on Christian places of worship in southern Sri Lanka. Buddhist nationalists and Buddhist monks have been accusing the Christian Church of religious conversions. In recent years the campaign has turned vicious. They also blame the Church of involvement in the death of Buddhist monk Ven. Gangodawila Soma Thera, who died of a heart attack in Moscow in December 2003. He had been an outspoken critic of conversions. According to the Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, 136 Christian places of worship were attacked in the 13 months between January 2003 and January 2004. The Alliance also says that 56 churches came under attack between 24 December 2003 and 31 January 2004. The Anuradhapura office of the



Christian humanitarian agency World Vision was firebombed on 8 February 2004. The attackers included three Buddhist monks and a university professor. Police arrested them. But Colombo University Professor Jayadeva Uyangoda says that police are reluctant to take action firm against offenders even when there is evidence.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *An Ayodhya in the making in Lanka* by Dr Jayadeva Uyangoda - *Daily Mirror*, 30 January 2004