

COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRACY AND JUSTICE SRI LANKA

NOT ONE PENNY AND NOT ONE GUN

The hopes and dreams of many thousands of Sri Lankans, both in the North and the South, that the negotiations between the Premadasa government and the LTTE leaders would bring about at least a temporary truce, if not a lasting solution, to the ethnic conflict, were shattered by the resumption of armed conflict between the Sri Lankan Security forces and the LTTE on 12th June.

The Premadasa government does not appear to have had any intention of bringing about a negotiated settlement to the ethnic problem, based on the recognition of the democratic rights of the Tamil people. Their strategy seems to have been, first, to use the LTTE both against the IPKF and other Tamil groups, and thereafter, to eliminate the LTTE itself. In the past, the Sri Lankan government supplied arms and logistic support to the LTTE; permitted LTTE death squads to operate freely even in Colombo and sabotaged the North & East Provincial Council Administration by depriving them of funds and legal powers. After the IPKF withdrawal, the Premadasa government began preparing for the next phase: the "peace talks" seem to have been no more than a smokescreen to cover up their preparation for war.

The Premadasa government has no solution to the ethnic problem. It is common knowledge that Mr Premadasa opposed the devolution of power and the establishment of Provincial Councils, as proposed in the 1987 peace accords. He also opposed the amalgamation of the Northern and Eastern provinces.

Mr Premadasa's distaste for democratic forms of government and his intolerance of opposition both inside and outside his government has led to the harassment, victimisation and even liquidation of those who dared to criticise him and his government. His regime has summarily executed 80,000 to 100,000 Sinhala youths between October 1989 and March 1990. It is no exaggeration to say that the Premadasa government is the most brutal and repressive government Sri Lanka has had this century. It is therefore idle to believe that such a government would ever seek a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict.

ANTI-DEMOCRATIC CHARACTER OF THE LTTE

Likewise the LTTE too has no commitment to democracy; they shun any form of pluralism; they have brutally murdered thousands of people who dared oppose their policies. They are a mirror image of the tyrannical regime in the South. Even if the LTTE did not trust Mr Premadasa, their opportunist wheeler-dealing with him only helped to strengthen his hand and prettify his regime.

At the very moment Mr Premadasa unleashed a reign of terror against the Sinhala youth, the LTTE was showering praise on him. Instead of seeking to unify in struggle all democratic forces to achieve the just rights of the Tamil people, the LTTE sought to eliminate and alienate all such organisations, thereby weakening the struggle for democracy of the Sri Lankan people and the struggle for self-determination by the Tamil people.

Therefore, while the Premadasa government is primarily responsible for the present wave of death and destruction unleashed in the North and East, the LTTE too bears a heavy responsibility for it. On the one hand, by its policy of liquidating all other Tamil groups, they

have weakened Tamil resistance. On the other hand, by opportunist wheeler-dealing with Mr Premadasa and failing to join hands with all oppressed and democratic forces in the North and the South, they have strengthened the barbaric Premadasa regime.

FOOLISH TRIUMPHALISM

Today both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE are engaged in triumphalist propaganda in an attempt to fool the people who are fed up with the carnage and misery caused by this conflict. The government is threatening to repeat what they did in the South - that is in short, torture and mass murder. The LTTE too are trying to fool their child conscripts that they can militarily defeat the Sri Lankan army.

But neither side can win this war. It is foolish for the government to believe that it can shoot and bomb the Tamil nation into submission. The LTTE also cannot win a military victory. This conflict is likely to continue for a long time.

Meanwhile thousands upon thousands of people both in the North and the South will continue to suffer, directly as well as indirectly from this unwinnable war.

NO AID FOR THE WAR

The Sri Lankan government and the LTTE have launched appeals for funds to sustain their military campaigns. All people who value democracy, justice and human rights must make absolutely clear that they will not give one penny nor help to buy one gun to sustain this insane war. We must say loud and clear that not a single human life is expendable.

PREMADASA REGIME MUST GO

Thirteen long years of UNP rule has brought Sri Lanka to the brink of ruin. Mr Premadasa and his bankrupt government cannot resolve the ethnic problem nor the general socio-economic crisis facing our country. These yesterday's men have neither the vision nor the political acumen to save our country from catastrophe. This is not the time for politicians of opposition parties to prop up Mr Premadasa's bankrupt regime on the pretext of "saving the country"

Instead every woman and man who is genuinely committed to democracy and justice must take urgent steps to build a mass based movement for peace - a movement deep and strong enough to sweep away the tin pot dictators from the political arena in the South as well as the North.

- * Down with the Premadasa Government
- * Not one penny not one gun for the war
- * For a peaceful and just settlement to the ethnic problem
- * For a mass based campaign for peace with justice

CAMPAIGN FOR DEMOCRACY AND JUSTICE IN SRI LANKA

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Sri Lanka: At war with itself

By Maharaj Krishna Rasgotra, former Foreign Secretary, who was lately in Colombo.

ONCE again, Sri Lanka is in the throes of a civil war. It promises to be brutal, bloody and long.

The aims of the two sides are clear and the hatred between them is so strong that there is no common area even for a search of compromise to begin. The LTTE wants nothing short of Eelam — an independent Tamil state in the North and East of Sri Lanka, and it seems to want to win its goal with the force of arms. The Government of Sri Lanka, headed by President Premadasa, is determined to defeat and destroy the LTTE, just as it defeated and destroyed the JVP in southern Sri Lanka.

In dealing with India, both President Premadasa and the LTTE have exhibited short-sighted opportunism. The LTTE, having agreed to lay down arms when the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement was signed in July 1987, chose, instead, to battle with the IPKF. Bludgeoned and battered by the latter, it joined the Premadasa Government in demanding the IPKF's immediate

withdrawal. It has now firing another insult and a challenge at the authorities in India by brutally murdering on March 16 last month 16 leaders of the EPRLF, a rival organisation of Sri Lankan Tamils.

President Premadasa, on his part, is propelled by the desire to seek immortality as the third ruler to have thrown out the Indians — Sri Lankan annals credit two earlier kings to have accomplished such feats in ancient times. When Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi refused to be stampeded into the IRKFF's hasty withdrawal, the President agreed to expedite adequate devolution of powers to the elected North-East Council and to provide caste-casteion guarantees for the safety and security of the Tamils. The joint communiqué of 18 September 1989 re-

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This mischief was compounded by

Only time will tell the price the two

countries will be called upon to pay in

Perumal regime in the North-Eastern

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Sri Lanka: At war with itself

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considerably and it is itching for an all-out fight with the LTTE. The Defence officials in Colombo think the Army will finish the job in a matter of months. They are likely to be disappointed.

I heard rumblings in Colombo last week to the effect that the Army would not tamely submit to ceasefire order from the President unless the LTTE were simultaneously to lay down arms. Possibly, President Premadasa's options are also getting limited and the contingency of the Army getting out of hand cannot be ruled out entirely.

In these circumstances, it is not enough for the Government of India simply to reiterate its resolve not to get involved in the Sri Lanka situation. By itself, this would be a retreat from responsibility. There are a number of factors to be considered. There can be no objection on our part to the Sri Lankan Government's determination to disarm or defeat the LTTE provided the Army's operations do not give rise to another stream of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka to Tamil Nadu. Indiscriminate bombing of the civil population, too is bound to attract adverse notice in India, though we must not overlook the LTTE's well-known cynical tactic of inviting enemy fire onto Tamil civilians by converting market places, hospitals, schools and other inhabited areas into battlegrounds. It is not for us to counsel negotiations unless there is a clear and reliable indication that the LTTE has given up the objective of Eelam. Ceasefire and negotiations, especially surrendering of arms is no part of the LTTE's mental make-up.

Mr Karunanidhi's government in Madras needs to be firmly advised against meddling with Sri Lanka. The Chief Minister's affection for the LTTE can hardly be anything more than a passing emotion. For not too long ago, when he was in the opposition, the groups opposed to the LTTE were the ones that enjoyed his favour. It says something for the general sentiment in Tamil Nadu that the popular vote in the last election was strongly in favour of the Congress Party. It was during that party's rule that the IPKF had administered a battering to the LTTE. In South Asia all countries have secession-oriented minorities of one or another description. It is in the interest of all to help ensure the integrity of one another. Political leaders in our States adjoining other countries are under a special obligation to avoid getting dragged into the affairs of our neighbours.

The Agreement of July 1989 and the

accompanying exchange of letters are of vital significance in the matter of safeguarding the security interests of India and the region as a whole. This was recognised by President Reagan and other important statesmen at the time. In Sri Lanka, the Agreement was approved by the Cabinet, the Government Group in Parliament and the ruling UNP working committee. Legislation under the Agreement was held by the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka to be within the constitution and was approved by Parliament. With the IPKF out of Sri Lanka, the Agreement is not a subject matter of controversy in that country anymore. In fact a number of intellectuals and officials in Colombo told me that the Agreement was good in that it had helped clarify the position of all concerned in relation to vital security questions and the limits which could not be crossed without incurring penalties.

Our Government will do well to spell out clearly to President Premadasa India's interest and Colombo's obligations in this regard. In situations of this kind it is harmful to let the impression grow — and this unfortunately New Delhi has allowed to happen in recent months — that even with solemn agreements liberties may be permissible.

If the situation gets murky in Sri Lanka, which it well might, outside forces may wish to enter the picture to India's detriment. At the moment the Sri Lankan Government is conscious of the necessity of not doing anything which might be perceived as a provocation in India. In the course of a week-long visit to Colombo, I could detect no evidence of Pakistan, Israel, China or any other foreign power getting involved in Sri Lanka as an arms supplier or in some other way prejudicial to India. But it is not difficult to visualise circumstances in which the Government of Sri Lanka or even the

LTTE might feel tempted to invite outside help which India might consider intolerable. That apart, continued denial to the Tamil population of equal rights as Sri Lankan citizens or some serious jeopardy to their safety and security would also attract the Indian concern as well as the provisions of the July 1989 Agreement. In friendly and confidential contacts on either side should let its mind be known clearly to the other. There should be no vagueness, no misunderstandings and no over-reactions or surprises in such unpredictable and difficult situations. That is what diplomacy is all about. This is the only way to avoid bringing upon ourselves once again the dangers of the kind we were confronted with in 1987.

Other than India, Sri Lanka is the only established democracy in South Asia. It is a small country and India has

a vested interest in seeing its unity and integrity preserved and reinforced. In a sense and up to a point the IPKF played a role in advancing that purpose. India or the IPKF, could possibly have no interest in setting up a puppet regime in the Tamil-dominated areas of Sri Lanka. The Varadraja Perumal regime was not an Indian puppet. It was an indigenous elected Tamil establishment. The realisation is growing in Sri Lanka that it was a mistake to deal with violence-prone LTTE as the only guardian of Tamil interests. It is my belief that there will be a role for rival Tamil groups in the making of peace in Sri Lanka. There is also need to revive the TULF. Tamil politics in Sri Lanka cannot be left to the mercy of the gun. Preservation and strengthening of these other Tamil organisations is another area for Indo-Sri Lankan cooperation.



Widening Conflict

TAMIL NADU
TIMES OF INDIA
JULY 28

The bloody conflict in Sri Lanka between government forces and the LTTE is taking on much wider proportions. According to the Sri Lanka defence secretary, General Cyril Ranatunge, the official figure for the number of Tigers killed in the last six weeks is 785, "but unofficially the figure will be around 2,000" while 316 Sri Lankan service personnel have died as well. But as the war intensifies, the incidence of civilian casualties, mainly Tamil, is also mounting rapidly. The LTTE, too, has taken to wreaking vengeance on Sinhalese civilians in retaliation for the deaths of Tamil civilians. On Thursday, it massacred 20 villagers in an area of Anuradhapura, district bordering the north-east, thirteen more were slaughtered in Trincomalee district in the east. There are fears now of the LTTE staging terrorist attacks in Colombo itself in order to spread panic and show it can strike at will. Whether or not it means to start a Sinhalese-Tamil communal war, the butchering of Sinhalese civilians is only too likely to provoke one. And as Colombo gathers its forces to assault Jaffna, having "captured" Trincomalee and other eastern Tiger redoubts, more innocent Tamil blood will inevitably be spilt.

On top of all this comes the ominous killing of 25 Sinhalese villagers deep in the southern province by, so it is suspected, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) cadres putting paid to government informers. If the JVP is in fact behind this bloodletting, then there is every reason to fear that it is back in the business of sowing death in the countryside. After the government's elimination, in at best dubious circumstances, of the entire top leadership, has the JVP put itself together again under new direction? Or is this incident only the residual settling of scores? It seems clear that Colombo wants nothing less than the total defeat of the LTTE, the latter, on the defensive, will go to any lengths to deny Colombo that victory. What if, in the meanwhile, Colombo has also to reckon with a revived and newly murderous JVP? The army will then go on killing Tamils in the north and east, the Tigers will massacre Sinhalese in the east and the Colombo area in the south-west, and the JVP will slaughter Sinhalese in the deep south. Were communal riots to start, the Indian Tamils in the central highland plantations would be the main target of Sinhalese fury. It is vital that Colombo heed the pleas of six Tamil groups other than the LTTE to start a dialogue with all Tamil political parties, including the LTTE, in order to end the bloodshed and devastation in the north and east. The LTTE will not be vanquished so easily, and while Colombo fanatically pursues that elusive objective, the JVP may be ghoulishly resurrected in the youth. It is a scary prospect.

TIMES OF INDIA

LTTE and India

It is the height of irony that the LTTE, which until recently denounced India in the vilest terms should now seek its support. Heavily battered by the Sri Lankan armed forces in the ongoing war, the LTTE has publicly aired the need for support. It is against this backdrop that the unabashed appeal of its London-based leader, Mr Sadasivam Krishnakumar, to India to help the Tamil Tigers should be seen. He wants India to equate the LTTE with the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the African National Congress and grant it official recognition because it is fighting for the oppressed people. Fully conscious of the treacherous streak in the LTTE's character, India is unlikely to be influenced by it. LTTE is the same force which went back on its promises and bled the IPKF which had gone to Sri Lanka on a peace mission. And, when it suited the Tigers, they entered into a secret pact with the Premadasa Government behind India's back and bit the hand that initially fed it. Since their understanding was with the limited objective of ejecting the IPKF, it lost its very basis when the Indian forces were withdrawn from there. Thereafter it did not take long for them to start one of the fiercest wars. The LTTE's conduct either in peacetime or in war has been far from confidence-inspiring as it seems fundamentally sold on the idea of Eelam, and does not keep the trust of anyone who opposes the idea of Tamil independence. India, which believes in the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka cannot support such a stance and, as such, the question of treating the LTTE in the same way as the PLO or the ANC does not arise at all.

Unlike the IPKF, whose emphasis was on restraint and the use of minimum force, the Sri Lankan army does not feel cramped by any such limitations in dealing with the LTTE. That may explain the unfortunately high casualty rate among Tamil civilians in the present war. The uninterrupted exodus of Tamil refugees to India is palpable evidence of the crisis facing the Tamil population. India has been rightly expressing its concern over the harsh drubbing the civilians have been getting from the Sri Lankan armed forces. If the reaction of the international community to the sufferings of the Tamils is muted, the LTTE is mainly responsible for it. It is the overconfident Tigers who are responsible for starting the present war. While the LTTE must take its share of responsibility for the tragic turn of events, it would be gravely unwise for Colombo to take shelter behind the miscalculations of the Tigers and make innocent Tamils suffer.

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TRIBUTE

The Human Touch

S.C.

I had returned home quite late that night when the telephone rang. Kheteswaran was at the other end. He spoke in his deep sonorous voice trying to conceal his emotions to the best of his ability. "Have you heard the terrible news? Comrade Padmanabha and several of our comrades have been gunned down and killed in Madras around 7 PM this evening." And then he narrated the incident as he had come to learn from his colleagues in the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) in Madras.

One could hardly believe him. It was incredible that 'Nabha' as K. Padmanabha — the EPRLF Secretary-General — was known to his close friends, and several of his party men had been butchered in the city of Madras, on Indian soil. Only the other day he was at my place in New Delhi with Khetes and Premachandran, the EPRLF MP who has now succeeded Nabha in the party. I had offered him some Bengali sweets and he ate with relish. The same evening I had taken them out for dinner and we exchanged views on so many developments — from the upsurge of democracy in Eastern Europe, Nepal and Burma to the far-reaching changes in the USSR; from the dismal scenario in Sri Lanka to the unfolding events in this country, and of course the frightening prospects of yet another Indo-Pak war.

Nabha spoke little. But he was an intent observer and listener. He had a charming face and used to sport a beard that he had shaved off the last time I met him. What was most striking was his magnetic personality. He

always inspired confidence. And above all, his sincerity of purpose was beyond question.

A mass leader par excellence his live-wire contacts with his people, especially in the eastern part of Sri Lanka (in Trincomalee in particular), endowed him with an extraordinary popularity that stemmed not from the barrel of the gun but dedicated service to the public.

Whenever he was in New Delhi he would make it a point to meet all his friends and acquaintances, young and old. I was privileged to be among them. A man of few words Nabha expressed himself through the warmth of his embrace. It came as a deep shock to all of us that Nabha, who was married only a year ago, should have his promising life cut short so tragically in the city of Madras from where his wife hailed.

Nabha was much more than a Sri Lankan Tamil militant leader. It was the breadth of his vision that endeared him to different persons who came in touch with him here. He always advocated close ties with the progressive Sinhalese while fighting for the legitimate rights of the Sri Lankan Tamils. At the same time he desired intimate relations with democratic forces in India. He was the finest embodiment of nationalism imbued with the spirit of internationalism in the highest humanist tradition.

We shall forever miss Nabha and always cherish his memory. His tragic end should spur us all to exert our maximum and call a halt to the bitter fratricidal bloodshed in Sri Lanka. (June 25) □