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Chandrika talks peace

Billion-dollar war budget for 1997

SPECULATION mounted over new peace moves as President Chandrika Kumaratunge laid down two conditions in early November for resuming talks with the insurgent Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In press interviews she again announced that the Sri Lankan government was ready to use third party facilitation for negotiations.

The President says the LTTE must indicate its willingness to lay down arms before talks could begin. The Tigers also must agree for a fixed time frame for negotiations to prevent LTTE using a ceasefire to regroup and rearm as on previous occasions.

The Tigers, celebrating the annual *Maveerar Varam* or Great Heroes Week from 20 November to honour LTTE martyrs, predictably rejected President Chandrika's offer. In his Heroes Week message LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran declared grave doubts about peace offers from a government that is making every effort to have the LTTE banned in Sri Lanka and abroad. Mr Prabhakaran imposes his own condition for talks - withdrawal of the Army from Jaffna - and declares ominously that no liberation war was won without death and destruction.

In an interview with the BBC while on an official visit to Paris, President Chandrika said she was not surprised at the rejection, describing the Tigers as opportunists and "paranoid about peace". The President urged the French government to implement the G7 Lyon Declaration on Terrorism and prevent LTTE fundraising and arms dealing on French soil. The Sri Lankan government has denied involvement in the killing of two senior Tigers in Paris in October, including head of international finance

Kandiah Perinpanathan. Paris was also the venue of the Sri Lanka-World Bank Aid Group meeting on 18 November. The consortium of 12 aid donor nations and multilateral agencies, while pledging \$860 million in economic aid to Sri Lanka for 1997, urged fresh peace initiatives without delay. There were no conditions linked to human rights but the Aid Group emphasised that economic reform and peace efforts must go hand in hand.

But the Sri Lankan government currently believes that peace efforts and a war strategy must go hand in hand. President Chandrika says that Prabhakaran must be further weakened militarily to the extent that he has no other option but to negotiate. Sources say some foreign intelligence agencies are working with the Army. According to press reports a high-level US military delegation arrived in early November to work out a plan to prevent arms smuggling to Sri Lanka, after a Tiger ship unloaded large quantities of weapons near Batticaloa.

Despite the rising cost of living the government is pouring money into the war with the Tigers. Presenting the 1997 budget in Parliament on 6 November Deputy Finance minister GL Peiris allocated Rs 48 billion (\$960 million) for defence. The National Security Levy of 4.5% will continue for another year. Sri Lankan NGOs say the real annual cost of the war is a staggering Rs 110 billion (\$2.2 billion) with its devastating effects on a divided society.

Architect of the government devolution peace proposals GL Peiris is confident that approval by the Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional

Reform (PSC) will be achieved in time for constitutional amendments in April 1997. But participating MPs say the PSC

has not reached consensus on any vital issue after eleven months of discussion. The Tamil parties are increasingly disillusioned and say that they will not support the government's fragile coalition in Parliament after April next year if there is no substantial progress. Tamil parties say the government proposals fall short of Tamil aspirations and continue to insist on the merger of northern and eastern provinces into a single unit to represent the Tamils. Reports say Tamil party EPDP leader Douglas Devananda has been offered a ministerial position to retain his support. The EPDP has nine members in Parliament.

The ruling People's Alliance (PA) also needs the support of the main opposition United National Party (UNP) for constitutional changes which require a two-thirds majority in Parliament. But the gulf between the two parties is ever widening. Party supporters continue to clash in various parts of the country. In a message to the international community, UNP Chairman Karu Jayasuriya says that the people involved in a coordinated campaign of violence against the UNP are connected to senior members of the PA government.

Former Finance minister and UNP MP Ronnie de Mel says that the government's November peace offers were aimed at the Paris Aid Group rather than the LTTE. Mr de Mel called on the government for a definite stand on third party mediation.

Meanwhile a cross-party group of 23 Sri Lankan MPs who participated in a seminar arranged by London-based NGO International Alert, in Northern Ireland in October have urged the inclusion of the LTTE in the negotiating process while recognising that an external facilitator may be necessary to restart peace talks. Following the seminar, the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) launched a programme to gather more support among MPs for peace talks and foreign mediation.

■ **At least nine Sri Lankan Tamil asylum-seekers including five women were killed when a hijacked Ethiopian Airlines plane crashed into the sea off the Comoros Islands in the Indian Ocean on 23 November. The Tamils were deported from Lagos and then from Bombay where Indian officials refused entry. Some 52 of 175 passengers survived the crash.**

THE NORTH

Fear grips Jaffna

THE Civil Rights Movement of Sri Lanka (CRM) expressed concern in late November over grave human rights violations in the Jaffna peninsula and called for speedy action to punish those responsible. CRM's statement follows a string of allegations of rape and murder. Currently 17 soldiers are in police custody for the rape and murder of Krishanthi Kumarasamy and Rajani Velayuthapillai in September.

Reports say ten year-old Atchuveli student Selvarajah Thenuka was raped by soldiers on 12 November. The Army has denied the allegations. Six days later the bodies of six people arrested by the Army in early October were recovered from a grave at Eluthumadduval in Thenmaratchy.

TULF leader M Sivasithamparam says in a mid-November letter to President Chandrika that three soldiers killed a man in Thenmaratchy and afterwards raped and murdered his daughter. Torture in custody is reportedly widespread and at least two people have committed suicide after summons from the Army.

Tamil MP Joseph Pararajasingham alleges in his letter to President Chandrika in late November that around 300 Jaffna civilians arrested have disappeared in the last three months and has provided details of 24 people.

The Defence Ministry has now agreed that the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) can set up an office in the peninsula. HRTF Chairman CT Jansz flew to

Jaffna on 12 November to assess the situation but spent less than 24 hours in the peninsula. Mr Jansz has a list of 550 disappeared from Jaffna GA Pathmanathan and is said to be cross-checking it against those in Army detention. CRM says that the security forces must be made aware of the legal obligation to report arrests to the HRTF without delay.

According to reports 37,000 people have applied to leave Jaffna. People arriving from the peninsula say there is widespread fear as the Army targets civilians following LTTE attacks.

Two soldiers and 11 civilians were injured in a Tiger grenade attack in Jaffna town on 2 November. Two days later the Army killed five Tigers during a search operation in Kantharodai. A LTTE infiltration unit killed five soldiers on 7 November at Idaikkadu in Thenmaratchy.

The Defence Ministry says three LTTE boats were destroyed off Mathagal by the Navy on 11 November. Two naval vessels were damaged in the encounter. A soldier was killed and four others seriously wounded in a landmine attack on 20 November at Kodikamam.

Observers say reconstruction is extremely difficult while fighting continues in Jaffna. Almost 90% of 413,000 people in Jaffna are dependent on government relief supplies. Around 8,000 from the Karaitivu Island, west of the peninsula, are unable to return home due to security restrictions.

Elections

Commissioner of Elections Dayananda Dissanayake announced on 27 November that nominations for local government elections in the northern districts Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar and Vavuniya will be received between 11 and 18 December.

Delegation

International Bar Association (IBA) President Desmond Fernando announced on 7 November that a delegation of the IBA will be invited to look at human rights in Sri Lanka.

Abduction

Eastern University philosophy lecturer Prof Ramakrishnan was abducted by the LTTE in mid-November. Reports say the Tigers are demanding Rs 1 million (\$20,000) ransom for his release.

Talks

British Foreign Office minister Liam Fox answering a question in the House of Commons on 27 November said that the British government was ready to facilitate talks between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE if requested by both parties.

Suicide attack

A LTTE suicide bomber exploded a bomb near a police jeep in Trincomalee town on 25 November. A policeman was injured. Following the incident a number of people were paraded before a masked informer and a man was detained.

300,000 trapped in the Vanni

TAMIL party EPDP says in a report to the Sri Lankan President that 339,700 displaced people in the Vanni receive dry rations currently and another 182,000 need government assistance. Shelter and water supply continue to be key concerns of NGOs.

Doctors in the Vanni say there is also a shortage of medicines. The Defence Ministry agreed to approve medical supply requests after a meeting with French medical agency Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) and the ICRC. NGOs confirm medicine supplies have been received in the Vanni.

Only 6,197 lorry-loads of the 12,000 lorry-loads of food aid needed for the period May-October were allowed into

the Vanni. Food lorries were denied entry for several days in mid-November after fighting erupted north of Vavuniya. Problems of distribution continue. Government officials in Colombo continue to sit on NGO permits despite repeated representations.

Seven people, including five children, died of septicaemia in Akkarayankulam hospital in Kilinochchi District in late October and early November. Doctors say undernutrition is making people susceptible to disease. S Ariharan, 15, died of malaria in the hospital.

In November the LTTE launched several attacks west and north of Vavuniya. On 7 November the Tigers killed two soldiers and injured seven others in an

attack on Army defence lines at Ganeshapuram and Varani, 8 miles west of Vavuniya town. The Army has denied Tiger claims that 31 military posts were destroyed. Seven Tigers died in the attack.

The Army and the Tigers clashed three days later near the civilians crossing point at Nochchimodda north of Vavuniya town. Three soldiers were killed. The Tigers launched an assault further west at Poovarasankulam on 14 November injuring five soldiers.

Twelve bodies were washed ashore at Koraiyady in Mullaitivu District in late November. The LTTE has accused the Army of killing youth in custody and dumping the bodies in the sea.

■ A rash of killings in the east

West of the lagoon

AS the LTTE prepared for Great Heroes Week celebrations in mid-November, the Army cut off food supplies to Tiger-controlled areas west of the Batticaloa lagoon and launched a military offensive. The areas were continually shelled from Army camps.

LTTE-held areas north-west of Batticaloa also came under attack. Sisters Lingeswary, 15, and Thiyageswary, 5, were injured by a shell at Ilupaddichenai on 16 November. Airforce planes damaged five houses in the same area two days later and injured 12 people. Farmers fled as shelters near rice fields were bombed.

The Tigers attacked a police party checking vehicles at Nidamalwela on

Polonnaruwa District on 9 November killing six policemen and four Home Guards. An Army patrol in Kiran on 25 November was attacked by the LTTE killing a soldier and injuring two others. Following the incident, soldiers ran amok assaulting people and shooting indiscriminately. K Pathmanathan and MB Thahir were shot dead. Houses and shops were damaged and several people were injured. The following day the village was shelled killing 60 year-old S Mylvaganam. People fled for safety and took refuge in jungles in Valaichenai and Santhiveli.

A woman in Kalkudah has complained that she was gang-raped by soldiers on 3 November. Five soldiers from

the Kalkudah Army camp have been arrested by police. On the same day Puthukudiyiruppu area in Valaichenai was shelled after LTTE shot and injured two policemen. Soldiers entered houses and attacked civilians. Sinnathangam, 75, and her daughter Hemalatha were wounded. Valaichenai National Engineering Corporation stores was damaged.

Soldiers used bus passengers as a human shield to travel to Kaluvankerni Army camp from Valaichenai on 8 November. Other soldiers fired on the bus mistaking it for Tiger vehicle seriously injuring 14 passengers. Tamil MP Joseph Pararajasingham has demanded an enquiry into the incident. Two men fishing in the Batticaloa lagoon near Mahilurmunai at night were shot dead by the Army on 10 November. Fishing in the night remains banned in the eastern districts.

The LTTE continued to damage electricity transformers plunging many areas into darkness. Assassinations in the east also continue. T Vimalanathan was shot dead at Sithandy on 15 November. Former TELO member K Gajendrarajah was killed on 23 November at Valaichenai.

In Amparai District P Dharmalingam, 60, died in crossfire when the Army and the LTTE clashed at 12 Colony village. The LTTE attacked a police post at 12 Colony village on 3 November killing six policemen and a Home Guard. Six Tigers died in counter-attacks by the Army.

prisoners

IF exhausted refugees imagined that entry into Vavuniya town from Tiger-controlled Vanni region would bring them respite, they were sadly mistaken. After restrictions at Thandikulam checkpoint were lifted on 22 October, around 16,000 people from the north entered Vavuniya. All of them were held for screening in 11 refugee camps seven of which are schools. Currently 8,000 refugees remain in these camps. Around 1,800 have left for Trincomalee to travel to Jaffna and only 300 have been allowed into the capital Colombo. Over 400 young men and women have been detained in special camps for several weeks.

The camps are over-crowded and sanitary facilities almost non-existent. According to the Red Cross officer Sivanathan Kishore three children have died of disease. There are only few toilets and water supply is inadequate. Tearful refugees told visiting UNP MP Jayalath Jayawardena that they were being held like prisoners against their will.

Vanni MP S Shanmugnathan says a number of women at the Poonthottam school camp have been sexually abused by the police. A woman who was raped has been admitted to the Vavuniya hospital. Pregnant women have been denied access to the hospital and one woman has died in labour. The Vavuniya hospital which has only six wards with 180 beds is currently treating over 1,500 patients a day. Many patients have to sleep on the floor. Sixty percent of the hospital staff were afflicted by a viral disease in early November. Reports say some doctors and nurses have not been paid wages for the last few months. Northern Province Rehabilitation Authority Chairman S Gunadheera says 100 new shelters will be built in Vavuniya for people arriving from the north. But people say they do not wish to stay in camps.

Journalists deported

FOUR Danish journalists who arrived to visit deportee Chitra Rajendran, 18, were themselves deported from Sri Lanka on 13 November.

Asylum-seeker Chitra, deported from Denmark was arrested in Colombo on 3 November. The journalists who met her at the Dehiwela police station were detained by police under Emergency regulations at a hotel in Mt Lavinia under heavy security before deportation.

Police in Colombo said that she had been arrested on a tip-off from Interpol that she was a fund-raiser for the LTTE in Denmark. Chitra has denied the allegations. Media minister Dharmasiri Senanayake says the Danish journalists were a security risk, as they had made false declarations on arrival in Sri Lanka.

Virakesari newspaper journalist Rasiah Selvarajah who wrote about the deportation of Chitra was summoned by police and questioned about his information sources. Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation journalist Sandung Jayasekera suspected of links with the Danish journalists was arrested in mid-November. Chitra's relatives Rajmohan and his father who provided her accommodation in Colombo have also been detained.

The police brought Chitra's sister Vasanthy and her husband by plane from Jaffna to care for her after the Mt Lavinia magistrate ordered her release on 21 November. Both have complained to the lawyers that they were handcuffed and treated like criminals.

Police powers promote torture says Colombo judge

Detention without trial

SUPREME COURT Judge P Ramanathan says despite judicial orders against law-enforcement officers, torture in police stations continues unabated. Police have powers to record statements, investigate and prosecute offenders. The concentration of powers allow the police to take short-cuts by torture in custody, says Mr Ramanathan.

Human rights agencies say prolonged detention also leads to ill-treatment. Currently there are over 1,100 Tamils in custody, 300 of whom are held for over two years. MPs who met detainees in Kalutara prison in early November say six Tamil youths are held for over five years and another six above the age of 50 are detained for over 18 months. Seven had been earlier released, arrested again and held for over two years.

Over 100 Tamil prisoners in Kalutara began a fast on 28 November demanding trials or release. Following a fast protest by detainees in June, the Defence Ministry promised to solve the issue

within three months. Prisoners bitterly complain that the Ministry has failed to take any action. Lawyers say the Defence Ministry has failed to act on several recommendations for release made by the Attorney General's Department.

Human rights agencies are concerned about illegal detentions. Some prisoners continue to languish in prison despite court orders for their release. In a habeas corpus application, Meenatchy Chitrasenan alleges that her daughter Thirumagal arrested in September is illegally detained in a police station without being produced before a court.

As LTTE's Great Heroes Week approached, security was tightened in Colombo and other southern areas. Over 150 Tamils were arrested in Negombo in early November and six women were detained. Over 100 Tamil youths were arrested in the Colombo suburbs of Wellawatte and Kirillapone. Several others were taken into custody in Slave Island in mid-November. Police say they

have received reports that 45 Black Tigers have infiltrated the city. Police also believe there are many Tigers suicide bombers among the 150,000 Tamil refugees in the capital.

A Tamil youth who had visited Switzerland as a tourist was arrested on Aluthgama beach in mid-November. A Swiss woman with him was also taken into custody. Press reports say Mohanarajah Thuraisingham deported from Germany was arrested by police on 19 November. Relatives say his whereabouts are unknown.

Reports say police introduced a new rule in late November, allowing only three days' stay in Colombo for those arriving from the north. Patients seeking medical treatment will be allowed a further four days. People say three days are hardly sufficient, particularly in view of the security restrictions in Colombo. Human rights agencies are concerned and say the rule is a further infringement of human rights.

UNHCR turns away would-be refugees

MANNAR officers of international refugee agency UNHCR have refused to offer accommodation to those refugees who attempted to flee to India. Seventy Tamil refugees who were produced before the Mannar magistrate in November had paid Rs 10,000 each to go to India, but the boatman had taken them only up to the Talaimannar Naval base. Many of the refugees are from Jaffna and say they decided to flee after reports of Army atrocities in the peninsula.

UNHCR officials are reported to have said that many refugees left Pesalai camp on Mannar Island without informing the agency. The camp in future will accommodate only those who wish to live in Sri Lanka permanently.

But many refugees in Tamil Nadu from Pesalai camp say they decided to seek safety after UNHCR officials declared that their safety could not be guaranteed after fighting between the Army and the LTTE on the island in August.

There are 30,600 people belonging to 8,200 families on Army-controlled Mannar Island. Around 2,100 families are entitled to dry rations from the gov-

ernment. Reports say 320 tonnes of food a month is needed for the population. All food has to arrive by boats from Kalpitty in Puttalam District or Colombo. LTTE attacks and boat hijacks have badly hit

the fragile lifeline. Currently food can be transported only with naval security and only 20 boats have been permitted to operate between Kalpitty and Mannar.

Difficult conditions on Mannar Island force many people to flee to India. Over 8,000 new refugees have arrived in Tamil Nadu since August. Another 56,000 are in government camps and 100,000 live outside.

Indian authorities fear LTTE infiltration with the refugee flow. Tamil Nadu police Law and Order chief P Kalimuthu says details of refugees and their fingerprints are sent to Sri Lanka and checked before admission to camps.

The Tamil Nadu government has set up a 2,000-strong border patrol force. Mr Kalimuthu says the 1,000km Tamil Nadu coast is constantly patrolled. Ten divisions of the state's Special Police and four divisions of central government Reserve Police are involved in security.

Reports say a smuggling operation to Sri Lanka from Vattanam was smashed by customs officers on 6 November. Six people were arrested. Six other Tiger suspects were taken into custody in Madurai and Trichy on 20 November.

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.

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