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Tamils urge new talks

Tamil intellectuals have again urged the Sri Lankan government to carry out extensive consultations with the Jaffna Tamil people and other minorities before introducing constitutional amendments to solve the protracted ethnic conflict.

The proposal was made at a meeting on 26 June with Justice minister GL Peiris in a series of discussions on the government devolution peace package designed to end the 13-year conflict. Tamil intellectuals argue that the opinions of the people themselves are vital to convince hardliners on both sides in the conflict and to avoid past errors which have led to the present impasse. The meeting followed the opposition United National Party's (UNP) rejection of a quasi federal union of regions through a new proposal from Presidential Counsel KN Choksy.

UNP MP KN Choksy suggests the amendment of Article 76 in the current constitution which prohibits Parliament from abdicating legislative power or setting up any authority with law-making powers and controversially retain Article 2 which provides that "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall be a unitary state". The Parliamentary Select Committee on Constitutional Reform is expected to examine the new proposal.

Observers point out Mangala Munasinghe's 1991 proposals for devolution on the Indian federal model were accepted by the UNP but shelved for lack of support from Tamils. Mr Peiris says leaflets have already been sent to the north and has requested the assistance of the intellectuals for consultation with the Jaffna people.

In the face of opposition to change of the unitary state from the UNP whose support in Parliament is vital for a two-thirds majority, the government may be inclined to examine other options, including the Choksy amendment. The government has already watered-down its devolution proposals introduced in August 1995 to head off opposition by Sinhalese hardliners.

Justice minister Peiris repeats government conditions for peace talks - laying down of arms and discussions on substantive political issues. The Tigers say the Army must withdraw from Jaffna before they could consider negotiations and have again called for international mediation.

President Chandrika Kumaratunge held several discussions with Tamil political parties in June to dispel fears that the government is promoting the ruling People's Alliance (PA) in Jaffna. The government has effectively denied access to the Tamil militant parties to Jaffna by prohibiting them to carry arms while initiating a campaign that the Jaffna people have rejected the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Tamil parties suspect that the government is attempting to step into the political vacuum created by their absence. Tamil party EPRLF leader Suresh Premachandran senses a distinct change in government attitude since the capture of Jaffna and says there are attempts to impose solutions.

Six Tamil parties told President Chandrika that the unitary provision should be changed to prevent the central government having an advantage in disputes with the regions, undermining devolution. They have also rejected the Choksy proposals. The Tamil parties continue to insist that the northern and eastern provinces should remain merged. But Sri Lanka Muslim Congress opposes

north-east merger without guarantee of a representative body for Muslims in the east.

At a meeting on 27 June President Chandrika sought the views of donors on a 29-page two-year reconstruction plan for Jaffna distributed earlier in the month. The plan envisages two stages - the first, resettlement and rehabilitation and the second, reconstruction and economic development - at a cost of Rs 13 billion (\$274 million).

Although some countries have offered assistance, donors are nervous over committing large funds because of security concern. LTTE attacks will continue and new fortifications are under construction to prevent Tiger infiltration.

The lack of coordination between various government ministries is making relief work difficult and without a land route to Jaffna peninsula, reconstruction also may become impossible. Donors seem to believe that people's participation is necessary for the reconstruction programme to succeed. But the LTTE, in a warning to the people ominously raises the question, "What need is there for rehabilitation when your freedom is lost?"

Although the government says that it will make every effort to achieve "peace through war", observers believe that it may become impossible to continue the strategy as the war effort may cost a massive Rs 46 billion (\$920 million) this year.

Justice minister Peiris repeats government conditions for peace talks - laying down of arms and discussions on substantive political issues to be completed within a specified time frame. The Tigers say the Army must withdraw from Jaffna before they could consider negotiations and have again called for international mediation.

International opinion turned against the LTTE after it unilaterally broke off peace talks in April 1995. Diplomatic sources say international mediation is unlikely without commitment and a more concrete proposal from the LTTE.

THE NORTH

Living in Jaffna

JAFFNA hospital Director Mrs N Kanagaratnam says that health facilities must be upgraded urgently in all areas of the peninsula to prevent diseases such as malaria, typhoid and diarrhoea.

Damage to the Jaffna hospital has been estimated at over Rs 50 million (\$1 million). The hospital lacks medicines. There are no surgeons and major surgeries are still conducted at Palaly military base. Only around 650 of the 1,200 employees of the hospital have returned to work. The Manthikai hospital in Point Pedro has only seven doctors and has not received any medicine since April.

Foreign and local journalists on their visit to Jaffna on 18 June found many people wandering in search of food. Thenmaratchy residents complain they have to walk several miles to Jaffna to buy food. They are delayed at military checkpoints which open only at 7.30am, for several hours and arrive in Jaffna too late to receive any food supplies.

A thriving black market has emerged and people say some government officers are in league with the blackmarketeers. Northern Province Resettlement & Rehabilitation Authority (NPRRA) Chairman Somapala Gunadheera says that food and medicine have to be transported by sea and only a few ships are available. According to Trade minister Kingsley Wickremaratne, essential goods transported to Jaffna by 16 private firms in mid-June included 700 tonnes of rice, 12,000 cement bags and 10,000 bicycles.

The Jaffna University reopened on 15

June with 900 of the 3,000 students. Vice Chancellor P Balasundarampillai says equipment worth Rs 300 million (\$6 million), including 300 computers, has been looted.

In Jaffna only 50% of students and teachers are attending schools. Students are also delayed at checkpoints. Northern Army Commander Maj.Gen. Neil Dias says checking student identity is necessary to ensure security. Millions of rupees worth furniture and equipment have disappeared from several schools.

Twenty five people have lost limbs in recent landmine explosions and are receiving treatment at the Jaffna hospital. Landmines have claimed over 30 civilian lives and are a major concern. A civilian was killed and two others injured by a landmine on 14 June in Jaffna town.

Following a visit by an EPDP delegation to Jaffna, the militant group's leader Douglas Devananda says 70% of the people are critical of the LTTE. The government has prohibited other Tamil militant groups into Jaffna with weapons fearing harassment of civilians.

The Tigers continue to target the military throughout the peninsula. Seven soldiers were killed in a Tiger ambush on 6 June at Meesalai east of Chavakachcheri. The Defence Ministry says seven Tigers were killed three days later at sea off Vetrilaikerni. A naval vessel was blown up on 11 June near Karainagar naval base injuring two sailors. A military vehicle was blasted in a LTTE landmine attack west of Kilali on 21 June.

NGO secretariat

A Bill for the creation of a national secretariat to coordinate NGO activities is expected to be tabled in Parliament after the Sri Lankan Cabinet approved Social Services minister AHM Fowsie's proposal on 5 June.

Tourists

Tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka for the first four months of 1996 fell by 33% for the same period last year. Between January and April 1996, 107,325 tourists visited the island.

Floods

Torrential rains and floods killed 12 people in mid-June and left 15,000 people homeless particularly in Nuwara Eliya, Ratnapura and Badulla.

Power

Colombo residents are increasingly irritable as electricity power cuts continue. After rains in mid-June the power cut was reduced to 5.5 hours a day from 8 hours. The government says further relaxation is possible only if there is heavy rain to boost hydro power.

Released

A south Indian court ordered the release of nine LTTE cadre detained since January 1993, after Tiger leader Kittu blew himself up with an arms ship when intercepted by the Indian Navy. The court said there is no evidence that the ship posed a threat to India.

Squeezing the Vanni

JAFFNA'S senior civil administrator Government Agent (GA) S Pathmanathan ordered thousands of displaced government officers among the 280,000 refugees currently in the Vanni, in mid-June to return to work in the peninsula. Wages and dry rations have been suspended for those who refuse to return.

The GA's instruction is part of continuing government pressure on the LTTE-controlled Vanni. Government officers say they must obtain permission from the LTTE as well as the Army to cross the frontier into Vavuniya to travel to Jaffna through Trincomalee.

Vanni schools are occupied by

refugees and reports say 200,000 students are without classrooms. Most classes are held in the open under trees.

Government Agents say they are prohibited by Colombo from providing any assistance to the 60,000 refugees who fled to the Vanni after *Operation Sunray II* in April. Around 2,000 families in welfare centres are facing starvation according to Kilinochchi GA Thillai Nadarajah. Mullaitivu GA R Tharmakulasingham has appealed to NGOs for help. But NGOs say the government has the responsibility to feed the people.

Tamil MP M Chandrakumar accuses the government of failing to provide drought relief to the Vanni districts.

Since January at least Rs 250 million (\$5 million) worth food was needed, but only food worth Rs 160 million was supplied. Cooperative union staff are afraid to transport food into the Vanni after union employee Sinnathamby Nagendran went missing between Thandikulam and Vavuniya, carrying Rs 2.3 million.

Over 300 youths from the north wishing to travel to Colombo were interrogated by the Army in Vavuniya in June. Only 140 were allowed to proceed. After Army officers at Nochchimoddaï checkpoint, north of Vavuniya, refused permission three times, M Kandasamy, 60, collapsed and died later in hospital. He was hoping to join his daughter in Canada.

■ Health and agriculture deteriorate in the east

Ambush at dawn

FOURTEEN soldiers were killed in a LTTE dawn ambush at Jayanthiyaya near Welikanda in Polonnaruwa District on 9 June. The Tigers control territory north of Welikanda-Valaichenai road and have launched many attacks in an attempt to disrupt Army supply lines.

Two days earlier the LTTE killed nine soldiers and four Home Guards in Welikanda. Rehabilitation minister MHM Ashraff criticised the closure of military camps in the east when he addressed Parliament on 6 June. Mr Ashraff says increased LTTE activity following troop withdrawal for the northern war is destabilising the east.

Two Tigers were killed in a clash at Nachchiyantivu on 10 June. On the same

day the LTTE exploded a bomb near Kaluvanchikudy police station injuring a policeman. Five days later two Tigers were killed in an Army ambush at Mylambaveli. A tractor was blown up by a LTTE landmine at Paithalai on 21 June injuring two Sub-Inspectors and two constables. The following day four soldiers from Urani Army camp died in another landmine attack at Sathurukondan, 5 miles north of Batticaloa town.

Army restrictions on LTTE-controlled Vaharai, north of Batticaloa town, continue despite military coordinator Maj. Gen. Cyril Peiris' assurance that ICRC-escorted food convoys will be allowed twice a month. District Health Officer S Thatchanamurthy is currently conducting

a nutritional survey in Vaharai. An earlier survey indicated that 90% of the people in the area were malnourished.

People say that conditions in Batticaloa town and other areas are also deteriorating. The main hospital in the district is in a poor state without adequate facilities. The hospital lacks personnel and equipment, particularly X-ray machines need replacement. The mortuary in the hospital lacks refrigeration and has become a health hazard.

Batticaloa town receives water only for a few hours a day. The power cut in Batticaloa District is much longer than in the rest of the country and residents say the telephone system has been neglected. Farmers say security restrictions have led to a steep rise in the price of rice. Military operations and limitation on fertiliser and fuel are affecting rice production. Many farmers have simply given up cultivation.

In Trincomalee District over 200 Tigers launched an attack on the Army at Meegasodella killing 29 soldiers on 1 July. The LTTE shot dead six members of a Survey Department team on 18 June in the same area.

Defence sources say two days before the second attack at Meegasodella, the Army overran three LTTE camps in Kumburupiddy jungles, north of Trincomalee town, killing 25 Tigers. Army Commander Lt. Gen. Rohan Daluwatte declared after visiting the area on 29 June that the "terrorists are on the run".

War within war

SHADOWY Tamil militant death squads are once again on the rise in Batticaloa. The Mohan group aligned to PLOTE has terrorised Batticaloa for several years and has been linked to former intelligence officer Richard Dias alias Captain Munas, implicated in the disappearance of 158 Tamils from the Vantharumoolai refugee camp in 1990. The Raziq group associated with EPRLF has recently surfaced. Observers believe EPRLF, which kept aloof from military activities for several years, has decided to throw in its lot after the fall of Jaffna and the apparent weakening of the LTTE. The Tamil militant cadres ostensibly provide translation service to the military and act as scouts and spotters during security operations. Both EPRLF and PLOTE deny that they have links with death squads. But reports from Batticaloa say these two groups are involved in detention, torture and execution of people suspected of links with the LTTE. Observers say that at least ten incidents of torture and execution

in the last three months are known to human rights groups. Analysts say the Mohan group has an extensive intelligence network in Paduvankarai area and has been successful in checking Tiger operations by killing several key Tiger leaders in ambushes. Eastern Sri Lanka has become a war within a war. The LTTE constantly targets members of PLOTE, TELO and EPRLF. The Tigers have killed around 100 people including those who have left the militant movements many years ago. Tigers shot and injured a TELO member on 16 June at Kaluvanchikudy. Vavunativu Village Headman T. Karthigesu was shot dead outside his home by some youths on the night of 20 June. The following day Rasiah Ganesh was killed by the LTTE at Malligaitivu two miles south of Thoppur in Trincomalee District.

Fever

DENGUE fever has claimed the lives of ten people in Amparai District. Reports say dengue which earlier killed 35 people in Batticaloa District is fast spreading in Amparai and hundreds of people have sought treatment in hospitals.

Health workers say sufficient Malathion preventive spray to eradicate disease-carrying mosquitoes is not available. Amparai residents have called on Health minister Fowsie for urgent action to prevent further deaths.

Rehabilitation minister Ashraff says Tiger infiltration in Amparai has increased. The LTTE burned eight buses belonging to the Sri Lanka Transport Board in Kalmunai in early June. Buses are often commandeered by the Special Task Force (STF) for military operations.

The STF killed three Tigers in an ambush on 14 June at Alayadivembu, 5 miles north-west of Thirukovil.

Tiger cadre burned two holiday homes further south in the remote Yala wildlife sanctuary on 15 June. Some 40 tourists in the homes were unharmed by the rebels, police say. The Tigers damaged an electricity transformer at Vinayagapuram near Thirukovil on 21 June.

Former TULF MP M Senathirajah has written to Deputy Defence minister Anuruddha Ratwatte complaining that Tamils in Amparai are being harassed by police. Mr Senathirajah says villagers have suffered physical attacks on a number of occasions. He points out that those most-affected by police atrocities are resettled refugees.

Tamil prisoners in Colombo protest four-year detention without trial

fast for freedom

TWENTY THREE Hill Country Tamil detainees at Colombo's Magazine prison began a fast on 23 June demanding trial or release. Later in the month they were joined by over 400 prisoners in Magazine, Kalutara and Pelawatte prisons. The Plantation detainees include a 14 year-old boy and several persons above 60 years. Reports say a large number are also held in police stations in Nuwara Eliya District.

Tamil MP Joseph Pararajasingham estimates that over 1,100 Tamil youths are detained and 300 are in custody for over four years without charge or trial. In a letter to President Chandrika the prisoners have called for her intervention. The fast was called off the following day after the Attorney-General's Department made several promises including improved conditions and speedy trial. The Department says cases are often delayed because it has no personnel to translate confessions which are in Tamil.

Arrests of LTTE suspects in Colombo

and other southern areas continue. The police believe attacks by Tiger suicide squads hidden among the 150,000 Tamil refugees in the capital will increase since the capture of Jaffna. Around 80 Tamils were arrested on 6 June. Colombo's Deputy police chief DMTB Dissanayake says a Tiger leader is among the detained. Police found ammunition for T-56 rifles in a Tamil-owned shop on Armour Street in Kotahena in late June. The owner of the shop is currently in police custody.

TULF MP K Thurairajasingham says that the Human Rights Task Force (HRTF) is ineffective in the case of Tamil detainees. At a meeting with President Chandrika on 12 June, Tamil groups demanded representation for political parties in the HRTF. The President has proposed an advisory committee comprising political party members to advise the HRTF.

The HRTF has appealed to the public for information on 11 people disappeared

between January and March this year, most of them from Batticaloa and Amparai. Disappearance and torture in custody remain as major concerns of human rights agencies.

Forty four Tamil prisoners in Magazine and Kalutara prisons have filed for violation of fundamental rights. Kasipillai Kandumani of Batticaloa alleges that he was forcibly taken by Tamil militant group member Manian Sinnavan in November last year to an Army camp where he was severely tortured. He also says Mr Sinnavan demanded Rs 50,000 from his wife for his release.

S Kathirgamathamby from Eravur, who was arrested in September 1995 has not been informed of the reasons for his detention. Hill Country MP M Sivalingam says that Balakrishnan, a resident of Nuwara Eliya for the last 20 years has been detained following an anonymous petition alleging links with the LTTE.

Tigers massacre civilians

A 30-member LTTE unit brutally hacked to death 14 Sinhalese civilians and injured seven others on 11 June at Lunuoya, 17 miles north of Puttalam near the Wilpattu wildlife sanctuary. The assailants used machetes and according to a survivor a house with eight bodies inside was set ablaze. Those killed included four children. Reports say six villagers were dragged into the nearby jungle and hacked to death.

Villagers say they sought help from a police post close to the village but were turned away. A day earlier the LTTE attacked a security post in Peymadu, east of Wilpattu in Anuradhapura District killing four Home Guards and a soldier. Inaction by security forces has created suspicions. North-Western Province Chief Minister Nimal Bandara has called on President Chandrika to order an inquiry into the incident.

Amnesty International accuses the Tigers of deliberately and arbitrarily killing Sinhalese civilians solely on the basis of their ethnicity. At a meeting with Amnesty in London on the same day of the massacre, Tiger representatives denied that it was an LTTE policy to kill

Sinhalese civilians. But the LTTE has thus far not responded to Amnesty's call to issue a clear statement condemning killing of civilians.

Observers believe, after the loss of

Jaffna, western Sri Lanka may become a major LTTE operational area. A large number of *Sea Tigers* have moved into the Kalpitty area and displacement of civilians continues from islands between Kalpitty and Kudremalai Point. *Sea Tigers* seized several boats loaded with goods in the Kalpitty area in early June. Reports say the Tigers have also established camps deep in the Wilpattu jungles.

North of Wilpattu in Mannar District the Army controls the Mannar Island and a coastal strip on the mainland. The LTTE often infiltrates the Mannar Island. Tigers hijacked a government van between Siruthoppu and Olaithoduvai on 11 June. A government officer who was returning in the van after supervising unloading of dry rations from Colombo at Pesalai and the driver were held for 12 hours before being released.

Around 10,000 refugees displaced from Jaffna now live in Mannar District. According to reports a ferry service will be arranged by the government for returning refugees. Around 35 people, mostly government officers have registered to return.

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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