

## From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

### Tamil militants restrained in India

*India puts pressure on Sri Lankan Tamils based in Tamil Nadu, as Rajiv Gandhi prepares to meet the Sri Lankan President.*

In a pre-dawn sweep against Tamil militants on Nov. 8 in Madras city and 10 other districts in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, local police seized a cache of weapons that included AK-47 rifles, surface-to-air missiles, rocket launchers, and two-inch mortars. Militant leaders belonging to various factions were brought to the police station, questioned, photographed, and put under house arrest.

The unexpected raid, named Operation Tiger, was organized with professional efficiency and air-tight security. The Tamil Nadu police were clearly fully supported by both state and central authorities. The raid has been welcomed by the Sri Lankan government, who had been urging the Indian government for some time to curb the militants.

Although the militant leaders expressed dismay at the police action, there was general apprehension that such an action would be forthcoming. Since 1982, a series of violent incidents involving the exiled Tamils have rocked the political climate of Tamil Nadu.

On May 19, 1982, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the People's Liberation Organization for Tamil Eelam (PLOTE)—a Marxist faction—fought a gun battle on the streets of Madras. On Aug. 2, 1984, a group of suspected Tamil militants blew up the international terminal of the Meenambakkam Airport in Madras, killing 31 people. Local residents staged a protest strike against the in-

cident in a small coastal town of Tamil Nadu.

But the latest incident, on Oct. 30 of this year, left police with little choice. Members of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) fired more than 60 rounds from automatic weapons at a crowd, following a street brawl in Madras. A 24-year-old bystander was killed in the incident, and a few others were injured before the situation was brought under control by local police. Later police arrested 10 EPRLF members and seized 6 automatic carbines, 6 machine guns, 1 pistol, 2 grenades, and 350 rounds of ammunition.

Such desperate activity by the Tamil militants has alienated local residents of the same ethnic stock. It is also an indication that the factionalized secessionist movement is now facing a growing crisis. Following the latest round of talks to settle the ethnic conflict between the Tamil moderates—the militants refused to participate—and President Jayawardene of Sri Lanka, the latter has come up with a proposal to form provincial councils which will allow the Tamils to determine the political process in Tamil-dominated areas of the country.

Although all the militant groups have formally rejected the President's proposal, LTTE, the largest faction within the militants, has couched their rejection in a carefully worded statement. In a written response to the Sri Lankan government, LTTE said: "We therefore insist that, for any meaning-

ful political settlement, the acceptance by the Sri Lankan government of an indivisible, single region as the homeland of the Tamils is basic." Experts point out that the LTTE has dropped the idiom of a separate state. It is, however, clear that the gap between Sri Lanka's offer and the minimum Tamil demand still remains formidable.

As of now, LTTE wields the maximum gun-power and has the largest following among the Tamil groups. It also controls a large tract of Tamil-dominated land in northern Sri Lanka. More importantly, Balasingham, one of the LTTE leaders, is reported to have developed a close relation with the Tamil Nadu chief minister M. G. Ramachandran. Ramachandran is a powerful political figure in Tamil Nadu and is key in India's effort to help facilitate a political solution to the Sri Lankan crisis.

Beginning Nov. 16, the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation is meeting for two days in the southern Indian city of Bangalore, where heads of state of seven south Asian nations—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Maldives—will be discussing matters concerning the region. On the agenda is a meeting between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and President Jayawardene to exchange ideas on how to proceed on the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile in Sri Lanka itself, the war of attrition continues. President Jayawardene has warned the militants that if they reject his proposal out of hand, he will use "all necessary means" to maintain law and order. There is no doubt that Jayawardene holds out an iron fist in a velvet glove.

The Indian police action to curb the militants will bear fruit provided that Sri Lanka can come up with a solution that is acceptable to the Tamils and decides to talk to the LTTE.