

Sri Lanka in Turmoil as Tamil Tigers Gain Ground

by Ramtanu Maitra

On April 23, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), better known as the Tamil Tigers, scored a decisive victory over the Sri Lankan Army and gained control over the strategic Elephant Pass Army base. The victory paved the way for the Tigers to once more threaten to gain possession of the northern Sri Lankan peninsula of Jaffna, an area under control of the Tigers until 1996.

Subsequent to the April 23 routing of the Sri Lankan Army, which left about 300 soldiers dead and a huge arsenal in possession of the Tigers, LTTE cadre have notched a few more victories, moving inside the peninsula, and virtually trapping 20-25,000 Sri Lankan soldiers there. With 5,000 well-armed Tigers advancing toward Air Force, Army, and Navy bases, the government in Colombo is looking desperate. The Sri Lankan Army's morale is at its lowest ever, and the danger that control of the peninsula could slip back into the hands of the Tigers, who have been engaged for almost two decades in attempting to set up a Tamil nation (Eelam) within Sri Lanka by force, is very real.

Colombo's Concerns

The government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga is under attack from both within and without. Having won a decisive battle, the Tigers are cock-a-hoop, and have offered a temporary truce to Colombo, to allow it to get its troops out of Jaffna. The Sri Lankan Army, humiliated and in total disarray, has rejected the offer, but reports of large-scale desertions from the Army point to the seriousness of the situation. President Kumaratunga, who is up for re-election this summer, has been blamed for the debacle, and she has sent distress signals to a number of countries, seeking military help. She has also hastily established full diplomatic relations

with Israel, and it is almost certain that it will be providing Colombo with arms, if not counterinsurgency training as well.

If Jaffna falls, that will be a telling blow to Colombo. Jaffna has a large Tamil population, who will be coerced to support the Tigers. The Jaffna coast is also the off-loading point for the Tigers' arms and narcotics smuggling. Narcotics from Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Pakistan fetch the Tigers huge amounts of cash, which is used to buy sophisticated arms. Latest reports indicate that the LTTE is now in possession of heavy artillery pieces and multi-barrel rocket launchers. The Tigers have also procured SAM-7s from underground channels in Cambodia, posing a threat to the tiny Sri Lankan Air Force.

The fall of Jaffna would not only provide the Tigers with logistical advantages, it would strengthen them politically as well. Last year, Norway—where a large number of Tamils live, and where the political leadership has developed ties to the LTTE—proposed negotiations between the Tigers and the Sri Lankan government. With the advent of a new government in Oslo, talks, which were ready to begin, did not take off. It is certain that if the Sri Lankan Army loses the Jaffna peninsula to the Tigers, the LTTE will up the ante, and the situation will get even more complicated for Colombo.

The Background

In a sense, the genesis of the ethnic strife in Sri Lanka can be traced to British colonial rule. Sri Lanka had undergone colonial conquest by the Portuguese (1580-1658), the Dutch (1658-1796), and the British (1796-1948). It was the British, using their traditional "divide and rule" policy, who instituted the formal separation of two ethnic groups—Hindu Tamils and Buddhist Sinhals. Tamils constitute only 15% of the

FIGURE 1

Tamil Tigers Theater of Operations



at effectively ending Tamil dominance in the bureaucracy; sanctions were imposed on Tamil candidates seeking school admissions, and Tamil was removed from its status as one of the official languages of the state.

On June 5, 1956, the first riot took place when hundreds of organized Sinhala musclemen were unleashed to beat up Tamil demonstrators protesting peacefully against the Act. Since then, the Sinhala leadership in Colombo has implemented half-hearted measures to assuage Tamil sentiment, but Sinhala chauvinism, orchestrated by the Buddhist Sangha, continued to alienate the Tamil population. A large number of Tamils left for India during the years that followed.

These betrayals, tinged with the overt racism of the Sinhala, slowly killed off the moderate Tamil

population, and yet in the British days they had a disproportionate share of government jobs. Unlike the majority Sinhala and minority Muslims in the island-state, the Tamils widely adopted English education.

As soon the British colonialists left the island on Feb. 4, 1948, the Sinhala majority began to redress the imbalance. In 1951, the first stone was cast when the government of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, father of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, took an unequivocal stand on the issues of language and the status of Buddhism as the official religion. Despite negotiated opposition from the Tamil elite, the resolution of "Sinhala Only" was adopted in 1956 with the passing of the Official Language Act No. 33. The Act was aimed

organizations, and gave rise to various militant Tamil groups. In 1972, the LTTE was formed, and its objective from its inception was to establish a Tamil Eelam. The LTTE set about to eliminate all Tamil political groups which were willing to negotiate with Colombo for a more acceptable social situation for the Tamils. The process of elimination, which primarily involved assassinations, became the hallmark of the LTTE, which were called the "Tigers," and also the "boys." The process had a serious effect on the Tamil population as a whole. Except for those Tamils who were brought in by the British from India to work in the Central Sri Lankan tea plantations, the Tamils began to identify with the LTTE.

July 1983: The Turning Point

The July 1983 Colombo riot, organized by the Sinhala chauvinists, with the tacit approval of the late President Junius Jayewardene, saw systematic destruction of Tamil properties in the Sri Lankan capital. This riot hardened the situation quickly, and began what is now labelled as the “17-year-long civil war.” During this period, many battles have been fought, thousands have been killed, negotiations have been started and halted, and many Tamils have moved out of Sri Lanka. They went to India, Europe, and North America, particularly Canada. A large number of them also went to Jaffna, where they feel less insecure.

With the cause of “Eelam” up front, the LTTE set about becoming an international terrorist organization by raising money from abroad. One London *Times* report showed that the LTTE raises close to \$3 million annually worldwide from self-exiled Tamils. Some of this money goes to humanitarian causes, but most of it gets plowed into maiming and killing people.

Since 1987, the LTTE has committed about 200 assassinations, all within the country, except in 1991, when a suicide squad killed former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. They have also attacked government institutions, Buddhist temples, the Central Bank, and the World Trade Center, among others. The killings and attacks were carried out using suicide squads carrying cyanide capsules.

Equally significant is the Tigers’ encroachment and taking over of the narcotics trade in a big way. Today, the LTTE is the single largest narcotics-trafficking organization. It picks up narcotics from Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. It shares its booty with secessionist groups elsewhere, and buys and sells arms. Foreign intelligence reports have documented the LTTE’s acquisition of a large shipping fleet, owned by expatriate Tamils and registered in Ibero-American countries, bringing into Sri Lanka’s east and northern coast narcotics and arms from Myanmar, southern Thailand, and Pakistan. They have allegedly bought SAM-7 missiles, which cost almost \$1 million apiece, on the black market, from renegade Cambodian generals. They also ship in large amounts of small arms from Singapore, although the Singapore government denies such allegations.

The Geopolitics of Eelam

Located between the Pacific Rim and the Middle East, Sri Lanka remains, even after the Cold War, important for geostrategic reasons. During the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Sri Lanka provided U.S. warplanes with refuelling facilities, and right now, according to intelligence sources, approximately 20 U.S. Army troops are engaged in a Joint Combined Exercise and Training program in Sri Lanka. According to military spokesmen, they are training local troops in reconnaissance and maritime operations. The United States has sent troops to Sri Lanka since 1994 under Operation Balanced Style. Forces

have included SEAL Team One, the Sixth Special Operations Squadron of the U.S. Air Force, and the Army’s Psychological Operations Group, according to *Jane’s Intelligence Review*.

Washington, however, is not the only one with interest in Sri Lanka. India and China are both building up their navies, and Sri Lanka is located right next to them. In 1987, when Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi signed an accord with President Jayewardene to place the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka to disarm the Tigers, there was a tacit agreement between New Delhi and Colombo that the Indian Navy would control the coastal waters east of Sri Lanka. The plan did not work, and Gandhi was assassinated, in part, because of the attempt.

This time around, when Foreign Minister Kadirgamar requested that India help the Army militarily, India was haunted by “Banquo’s ghost.” What happened in 1987 is a sordid affair: Indian soldiers, who were sent in to restore peace between the Tigers and the Sri Lankan Army, were pitted against the Tigers, and had to stay there for three years. Besides criticism within India and from abroad, the Indian Army came back virtually defeated, with nothing to show for the effort except about 1,200 dead soldiers. There were reliable reports that Colombo was sending trucks full of arms to the Tigers to kill Indian soldiers.

So, when Colombo sent its most recent distress signal, New Delhi balked. To begin with, India does have an interest in controlling the waters around Sri Lanka, and sympathizes with the Tamil cause. There is also a large Tamil population in southern India, a stone’s throw away from Jaffna (see map). India does not want to project itself as the annihilator of Tamils on behalf of the Sinhals. Commander A.S. Kalkat, who led the IPKF, said in early May that India very much values the importance of the port of Trincomalee, on Sri Lanka’s east coast.

India, however, has made it clear that it will not let Sri Lanka be divided, and will do everything to protect its unity and integrity. Indian military experts consider that the situation in Jaffna is not hopeless, and believe that the Sri Lankan Army, enjoying the advantage of numbers, can extricate itself from trouble. New Delhi has made it plain that it believes the civil war is based on political problems, and that it cannot be resolved through force of arms. New Delhi also does not believe that the Tamil-Sinhala negotiation can be mediated

Background to the News

**See “Terrorism in South Asia:
London’s Assault on the Nation-State,”**

EIR, Oct. 13, 1995.

Back issues \$12, postpaid.

by Norway or any other country, except India. All these views have been conveyed to Colombo by New Delhi, officially and through unofficial channels as well. In fact, a Norwegian delegation has landed in New Delhi to discuss these issues with India.

Britain and Israel

Besides India, there are two other countries with distinct interests in the civil war. Britain had built up the Tamil community and pitted it against the Sinhala, and continues to do so. The foreign headquarters of the LTTE is in London, where it raises money by openly promoting Tamil terrorism. Whitehall, the Foreign Office, wrings its hands and says it can do nothing about it. But, there is more.

The Tigers' master planner, Anton Balasingham, is based in London and is fully aware of the developments on the ground. When the Elephant Pass battle was over, BBC picked up the Tamil version of the battle and said that more than 1,000 Sri Lankan soldiers had been slaughtered. This was done obviously to further boost the Tigers' morale.

Canada, a British outpost in North America, is also extremely active in pushing the Tigers' way of conducting the civil war. Recently, two Cabinet ministers, Finance Minister Paul Martin and International Cooperation Minister Maria Mina, were attending a function hosted by the Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils (FACT), a front organization of the Tigers. In its latest report, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service has identified the World Tamil Movement, FACT, and the Tamil Eelam Society of Canada as leading LTTE organizations raising money within Canada and hobnobbing with political figures.

The fourth interested party is Israel. Israel was kicked out of Sri Lanka twice: once in 1971, when it was suspected of involvement in an uprising by the right-wing JVP, a Sinhala group, against the left-leaning government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike, mother of President Kumaratunga. It was kicked out again in 1989, when it was discovered that the Mossad intelligence agency, besides training the Sri Lankan Army in counterinsurgency, had hosted a number of Tigers in Israel for training with grenades and belt-bombs for suicide bombers. At this time of crisis, President Kumaratunga has again called upon Israel, and Israel, no doubt, will respond. The Israeli interest section, which used to operate from within the U.S. Embassy, may have designs which do not coincide with those of the United States.

By bringing in outsiders, Colombo is getting mired in geopolitics. There is no question that Colombo must bring the situation back on an even keel, and then start negotiations immediately. For years, Colombo has ignored the danger posed by the British involvement with the Tigers. The Sinhala nobility, or the powerful families, are essentially Anglophiles who look up to London for justice and even-handedness. It is time that they look at the other Britain, whose colonial instincts are very much alive.

Thailand: Transparency International Attacks the Institutions

by Michael O. Billington

The economy of Thailand has never recovered from the speculative attack of 1997, the first round of the global financial breakdown which is now reaching its terminal stage. Under International Monetary Fund (IMF) dictates, Thailand's government bailed out the foreign debt held by corporations and banks, using taxpayers' money, while the real economy and the standard of living plummeted. Now, while the British-American-Commonwealth (BAC) banking oligarchy is picking over the bones of the collapsed banks and industries, the institutions of state are disintegrating, helped on by the same BAC operatives.

With national elections coming up at year's end, both the government party (the Democrats) and the main opposition party (New Aspiration Party, NAP), as well as the smaller traditional parties, have, over the past two months, been wracked by scandals, arrests, or indictments of leading members (including even a politically motivated sting by the U.S. Department of Justice!), and defections of various leaders and their factions.

These events are not coincidental. The dead giveaway that these actions are being orchestrated by the international financial oligarchy, was the establishment in March of a Thai branch of Transparency International (TI), headed by the BAC's leading operative in Thailand, Anand Panyarachun, who has played a leading role in the destruction of Thailand's economy and institutions over the past decade. Each of the scandals and internal conflicts (some of which are described below), can be traced to Anand and his international allies, who have formalized their presence with the founding of TI-Thailand.

TI is a project of the World Bank, established in the early 1990s under the direction of a World Bank official, Peter Eigen. It later went private, but Eigen remained, and is still today, its director. TI's assignment was to masquerade as an "independent, impartial" non-governmental organization (NGO), passing judgment on both government and corporate sectors, which resisted the free trade, privatization, deregulation dictates of the IMF-World Bank globalization predators. This has been applied not only to the Third World "recolonization" effort, but was also at the center of the "Clean Hands" apparatus which destroyed the national institutions in Italy,