

INSURGENTS

## Tigers North, Marxists South

No lasting peace is possible in Sri Lanka without a settlement with two highly militant groups at odds with each other: the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the ultra-Sinhalese Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front). Their only common ground: both want Indian troops out.

The Tigers rose from the ashes of Sri Lanka's first Tamil militants, the

keeping Force, killing more than 900. Their own losses, intelligence sources say, amount to around 750. But the sheer weight of the IPKF, which at the height of the conflict numbered some 130,000, has reduced the Tigers to loose squads of hit-and-run fighters operating out of fortified bases deep in the jungles of the island's northeast.

The Tigers steep themselves in a potent mythology. They draw their name from the symbol of the Cholas, the Tamil warrior kings of antiquity. Fighters take a death vow on initiation, and carry cyanide capsules to remind them of their obligation if captured.

The Tigers have no political ideology, other than the desire for a separate state of their own on the island.

The Sinhalese rebel group in the south, however, professes to be Marxist. The JVP has drifted in and out of legality since emerging from schisms in the Sri Lankan Communist Party in the late 1960s. An attempted insurrection in 1971 sparked a massive purge by the government of then premier Sirimavo Bandaranaike — some 10,000 died, and leader Rohana Wijeweera and his close associates were jailed. They were released, and the JVP's legality restored, when Junius Jayewardene's United National Party swept to power in 1977. Six years later the JVP was accused of instigating anti-Tamil riots, and again banned. After the signing of the 1987 Indo-Lanka accord, the JVP set up a "militant wing," the Deshapriya Janatha Viyaparaya, or Patriotic People's Movement. The DJV is blamed for having since killed more than 1,000 people.

The JVP is said to have more than a million sympathisers, almost exclusively Sinhalese. The party is well organised politically, with its own newspapers and radio station. It controls the nation's largest student body as well as some important trade unions, and has displayed its strength in calling for all-out strikes that have regularly paralysed urban centres. The government lifted the ban on the JVP late last year, but Wijeweera and party general secretary Upatissa Gamanayake have remained underground. ■



Tiger power: The Tamil-Sinhalese factor

Tamil New Tigers, in 1978. Cadres were recruited mostly from what was then Northern Province. The group is led by Velupillai Prabhakaran. In his late 30s, Prabhakaran is a formidable guerrilla tactician who tolerates no dissension in his ranks. He is believed to command some 1,200 men, armed mostly with Soviet-made Kalashnikov and European G-3 assault rifles and skilled in the handling of explosives.

In their 1983-87 separatist war against the Sri Lankan armed forces, the Tigers lost some 760 fighters in their battle for control of the Jaffna peninsula. Since September 1987, they have fought troops of the Indian Peace-

Muthuvel Karunanidhi, chief minister of the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu, claimed in *The Times of India*: "The demand for Eelam now has the tacit support of the government of India." On June 20, the same newspaper, which is regarded as reflecting official thinking, called for a "Cyprus solution" to Sri Lanka and said this would "receive enthusiastic support in India." (The Mediterranean island of Cyprus was partitioned following an invasion by Turkey in 1974.)

Two weeks after Premadasa's ultimatum, Gandhi, 44, declared that any withdrawal would be "conditional" and must be a "joint, parallel and linked exercise along with the devolution process so that the Tamils and the provincial council can look after their security." Despite the new devolution law, Gandhi said "devolution on the ground was not adequate." Perumal has repeatedly complained about Colombo's failure to grant real power to the provincial council. Wijeratne retorts that Perumal's administration "is politically inexperienced and does not know how to exercise power."

Gandhi's reaction sparked a furious response from Colombo. Railed Premadasa: "There is only one condition that has to be met for the withdrawal of this [IPKF] force. That condition is that it should be on the decision of the president of Sri Lanka. Now that condition has been met." As to Indian requests for a proper time-frame, Wijeratne bluntly replied: "What is this time-frame they are talking about? You know how speedily they came. Speedily they can go."

Indian officials told Asiaweek they believe there is another dimension to



Flood victim: A state of emergency — and

Premadasa's pullout call. They point to reports of a Tigers-JVP pact under which the Tigers pay for arms from Europe — which are then allowed to pass through Colombo by JVP sympathisers. The JVP's cut is a share of the weapons. Premadasa's gamble, continues the Indian scenario, is to prevent seepage of support to the JVP by wrapping himself in the flag and demanding the Indians leave. Meanwhile, his talks with the Tigers could lead to the arms pact with the JVP being severed. In return, say New Delhi officials, the Tigers would be allowed to return to the northeast and — with the Indians gone — have a free hand to engage Perumal's militia.

If this is the president's goal, say the Indians, it is doomed. "Both the Tigers and the JVP," asserts an Indian official, "will not aim for anything short of full power. After they have used Premadasa, they will not spare him." Still, while his request was officially spurned, Indian opposition parties urged its acceptance. And Gandhi's response was also criticised in government circles. Said one official: "He should have said he's happy to withdraw quickly — but would you mind also speeding up on your part of the bargain?"

**C**olombo has said it may seek help from the U.N. This cut no ice with Gandhi, who asserted: "We are the joint guarantors of peace on the island." But peace is proving elusive — as was clear from the June 20 imposition of a state of emergency in the wake of strikes and growing civil unrest. With the Colombo-Delhi stand-off showing no signs of compromise, it seemed the only sure bet was that strife would continue to plague Sri Lanka. ■



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