

LTTE playing the old tricks again

As third executive president, Mr. Dingiri Banda Wijetunga inherited assassinated leader Ranasinghe Premadasa's problems (headaches) including Prisoner of War (POW) crisis. When 72 year old Wijetunga assumed presidency on May Day he was automatically forced to seek ways and means to solve problems, some of them resulted in by the short sighted policies of the Ranasinghe Premadasa administration. The Prisoner of War crisis could be described as just one headache inherited by the new administration and Wijetunga was determined to tackle it.

When the LTTE leadership indicated it was prepared to release the 39 hostages including the soldier held captive in Jaffna Wijetunga's administration reacted positively. Negotiation commenced last month and the government was confident of securing the release of all hostages simultaneously.

But the LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran had other ideas on his mind. After holding the 38 policemen for 37 months and the soldier for 22 months the LTTE chief was determined to use them as ransom in negotiation with the Government.

The LTTE highcommand was planning to secure a pledge from

the government to increase supplies to the Jaffna peninsula and supply Jaffna with previously banned items including petrol, fertilizer and diesel, senior security forces officers said. "They were planning to take us for a ride again," admitted an officer who predicted determined LTTE bids to fool both the political and military leaderships.

What the hostage crisis proves conclusively is that the government needs an entirely a new approach to secure the remaining POWs security forces officers said.

"We do not want the government to fall for

Beginning late 1991 the ICRC officials have been trying to organise a family visit to Jaffna, security forces officers said. However the previous government continuously opposed the idea of sending Sinhala civilians into the LTTE held territory.

But this time Wijetunga's administration hoping to gain freedom for the 39 POWs agreed to send their loved ones to Jaffna.

When the relatives arrived in Jaffna in the third week of June the situation had changed completely. The LTTE high command then de-

leasing six policemen. With them 37 relatives who visited the peninsula have come back to Colombo leaving about 40 others there.

The first five released hostages arrived in Colombo on June 30 and the last one on July 1.

When 'The Island' contacted brigadier Weerasekara Thursday he declined to talk about the role he played in the latest attempt to secure the release of POWs. 'I don't want to talk with the press or anybody else,' declared Weerasekara who claimed that he had done his best for the country.

Senior security forces officers said the LTTE was planning to use the hostages to gain vital supplies with the ultimately objective of waging war against the security forces.

Officers admitted that the LTTE high command came close to fooling the government exactly three years after eruption of the Eelam war two and the seizure of hundreds of hostages. The remaining policemen were the only persons who escaped brutal slaughter after they surrendered to the LTTE on orders of the previous government sources said.

The security forces believe the LTTE was trying hard to break the siege of the peninsula.

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by Shamindra Ferdinando

LTTE tricks again,' one officer said.

When the latest negotiations involving the government, LTTE and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) recommenced in Jaffna early last month security forces officers knew the LTTE high command was upto its old tricks again. The LTTE initially demanded that parents and close relatives (two each) of the captives must be transported to Jaffna to witness the release of their loved ones.

The government had then directed the Joint Operations Command (JOC) to permit the ICRC to take relatives to Jaffna.

manded a senior representative government representative to come there to welcome the released hostages.

When the ICRC informed the government of the LTTE demand for a representative Wijetunga's administration quickly despatched brigadier Ananda Weerasekara to Jaffna to take part in the negotiations.

When he arrived in Jaffna the LTTE changed its position again by demanding an immediate end to the military imposed siege of the peninsula. After that negotiations and medical reasons resulted in the LTTE re-

LTTE playing....

Today the army and the other services control all entry points to the peninsula thus forcing the LTTE to use the risky Kilali sea route with tremendous amount of casualties. Tamil civilians have been also forced to use the same route in LTTE run boats thus drawing fire from the Navy.

The siege of the peninsula commenced in late 1991. First the combined security forces seized control of small islands west of the peninsula in operations September-October 1991. Then in the last week of October sea borne troops secured a beachhead at Comar, south of Mandathivu and proceeded to take control of Pooneryn. The capture of Pooneryn ended movement of civilians to and from the Jaffna peninsula, across the Sangupiddi Strait

and through Pooneryn peninsula.

Despite some determined bids to dislodge the security forces from Pooneryn they remained in force.

The LTTE highcommand had to abandon using the area for the movement of men and material to and from the peninsula.

By that time the Army was in control of the Elephant Pass causeway linking the mainland with the peninsula. Two entry points, Kombadi and Ooriyan used to cross the Elephant pass lagoon were also in the hands of the Army.

The LTTE was unable to move men and material quickly to and from the peninsula. Heavy concentrations of troops in the Welioya region (Manel Aru) further troubled the LTTE highcommand.

Then the LTTE commenced using the Kilali Sea Route.

Beginning December 1991 the LTTE started a major operation to move supplies across the lagoon. The government moved quickly to halt the Kilali operation. Traffic was banned in the lagoon and a Navy base established at Nagathivanthurai to intercept LTTE sea Traffic.

However the operation had become a nightmare for the LTTE with the Navy attacking boats carrying civilians, supplies and the LTTE terrorists.

Senior security forces officers described the decision to release hostages in return for supplies including diesel, petrol, kerosene and engine oil and fertilizer as an attempt to overcome the problems posed by the siege.

"The LTTE wants the government to supply

them with the previously banned items," one officer said.

Officers said that if the government supply permits previously banned items particularly fuel there was no point in continuing with the present strategy.

The strategy had been to cut off the peninsula and continue operations in the Eastern theatre of operations.

They admitted if the petrol was despatched to Killinochchi the barrels will definitely end in some LTTE camp in the Wann.

Earlier the plan was to send 500 barrels of diesel, 100 barrels of engine oil, 500 barrels of brake oil, 1500 barrels of kerosene, 50 metric tons of urea and 500 barrels of petrol as part of the payment for releasing the 38 policemen and the soldier.

For some luck the

LTTE plan failed to work some security forces officers said.

They said the ICRC will have to bring back the relatives to Colombo.

They said that political decisions must not create additional problems or threaten the war effort. The previous government's decision to arm the LTTE against the Indian forces was described them as one of the most craziest developments in the north east conflict.

The LTTE tricked the earlier leader in a way which ultimately resulted in his own death one source said.

Officers said the forces were totally against any move which will help the LTTE militarily. They said the fighting men must be consulted before any decision affecting the war strategy considered by the political

leadership.

The last time the Government lost hundreds of policemen, military camps vital security interests with the LTTE broke off talks with Premadasa administration and declared war in June three years ago, they said. At that time the forces not even the slain Deputy Minister Ranjan Wijeratne was consulted in defence affairs. The president did what he want to do and one of the results had been the creation of a hostage crisis.

Still the authorities have failed to secure the release of the men considered the poor victims of short sighted, politically motivated and ill fated policies of the previous administration which held 14 months of secret talks with the LTTE without gaining politically or militarily sources said.

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