

Ottawa warned of reprisals if Sri Lankan officials probed. (1986, September 24). *The Globe and Mail*.

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Canadian Press

OTTAWA

The controversy over the past military activities of the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Canada threatened to escalate into a full-blown diplomatic row yesterday, when the Sri Lankan Government took the offensive in the dispute over its envoy's record as an anti-terrorist.

Two Sri Lankan Cabinet minis-

ters issued somewhat bizarre statements, one saying Colombo wants the extradition of a Tamil refugee visiting Canada and the other threatening reprisals against Canadian diplomats if Ottawa decides to inquire into the record of the High Commissioner.

External Affairs Minister Joe Clark did little to clarify the situation when he said there might be allegations of something dark in the past of former Brigadier-General Tissa Weeratunga, but there aren't

enough "true facts" to justify Canadian action against him at this stage.

He said Canadian officials are making cautious inquiries into allegations from several sources about an alleged record of torture and military excess by Brig.-Gen. Weeratunga and his troops battling Tamil separatists since 1979.

He served for six months as head of a special military force putting down Tamil insurgency in northern Sri Lanka in 1979. Later, he was chief of staff of the Sri Lankan armed forces, and after that was the army commander, responsible for the military response to the terrorist threat.

The controversy gained focus when Tamil refugee Umapathisivan (Baby) Pararajasegaran arrived in Ottawa on Monday and held a news conference to accuse the High Commissioner of torturing him while he was in detention in 1979.

General Weeratunga insisted in an interview that he is innocent and denied ever harming a hair on Mr. Pararajasegaran's scarred head. He went on to say that Mr. Pararajasegaran is wanted in Sri Lanka on suspicion of murder.

The Sri Lankan Government apparently also issued a belated warrant for the arrest of Mr. Pararajasegaran, which it is using to justify its demand that Canada extradite him to Sri Lanka.

But a spokesman for the External Affairs Department said there is no extradition treaty between Canada and Sri Lanka, and therefore no obligation on Canadian authorities to co-operate with that request.

Neither Mr. Clark nor the spokesman for his department would discuss the apparent threat by acting Sri Lankan Foreign Affairs Minister Tyrone Fernando to take action against Canadian diplomats in Colombo if inquiries are launched in Canada into General Weeratunga's fitness for diplomatic status.

Mr. Clark took a cautious line responding to questions from reporters about Mr. Fernando's statement.

He said he had not seen the supposed threat and he would not say how seriously he regarded it until he had.

Mr. Clark's comments gave no indication of what action the federal Government is taking to determine whether the allegations by Mr. Pararajasegaran and others about General Weeratunga's past are true.

Mr. Clark said that some of the facts are being disputed by the Sri Lankan Government and efforts are being made to separate the wheat from the chaff.