

Key Actors

in the Ethnic/National Crisis

Political and military actors from the north and east

Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP)

Led by Douglas Devananda, the EPDP broke away from the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) around 1988. Since 1990, it has fought alongside the Sri Lankan Army against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Since 1994, the EPDP has been the most significant force in electoral politics in Jaffna, though voter turnout has been exceptionally low. The EPDP has generally been supportive of PA government policy on the war and peace process. EPDP armed cadres, however, numbering in the hundreds, retain a reputation for human rights abuses.

Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF)

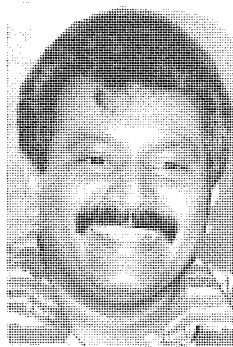
Within the Marxist wing of the Tamil national movement, the EPRLF split from the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS) in 1980. In later years, the EPRLF emerged as a favoured ally of the Indian government and was

returned as the leading party in the North East Provincial Council created under the terms of the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord. The EPRLF went on to consolidate its alliance with the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) and co-conscripted a Tamil National Army to fight the LTTE. These moves stirred widespread popular resentment. As the IPKF departed in early 1990, EPRLF leaders unilaterally declared Eelam but then fled to India where most were assassinated by the LTTE. The EPRLF lost all parliamentary representation in the 1994 elections.

Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS)

EROS was formed in London in the mid-1970s as an academic research group of left-wing Tamil nationalists. In these early days, EROS built links with Palestinian militant organisations and spearheaded military training for the whole Tamil militant movement. EROS has split into several factions over the years and some cadres have joined the LTTE, particularly abroad. It remains the most radically nationalist of the constitutional Tamil groups, but is not militarily active.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)



Led by Velupillai Pirabhakaran (left), the LTTE were founded in the mid-1970s and have marginalised all rival Tamil militant groups through a combination of strict internal discipline, military ruthlessness and political sophistication. It was the only Tamil group

to denounce the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord, subsequently fighting the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) and forcing its withdrawal.

Between 1990 and 1995, the LTTE ran a civil administration in the Jaffna peninsula and continues to control many functions of government in some areas of the north and east.

Independent of any foreign power, the Tigers are sustained by the political and financial activities of the international Tamil diaspora and by their own commercial and propagandist enterprise. They possess capabilities in conventional warfare on land and sea as well as a unit of suicide bombers who continue their attacks on political, economic and cultural targets. They participated in peace talks in 1985, 1989-90 and 1994-95 but withdrew on each occasion. The LTTE have committed a wide range of human rights abuses through the war, including massacres of Sinhalese and Muslim civilians, and the 1990 forced displacement of Muslims in the north. It is a banned organisation in Malaysia, India and the US as well as in Sri Lanka. In the current armed conflict, the LTTE have lost territory and taken heavy casualties, but remain a formidable military force. Sri Lankan and western intelligence agencies estimate it has between 14 and 18,000 armed cadres.

People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE)/Democratic People's Liberation Front (DPLF)

Originally an LTTE splinter group, the PLOTE was never well-armed and its military activities remained low key. In time, internal feuds and a souring of relations

with its Indian sponsors fuelled the PLOTE's slow demise and the group was largely wiped out by the LTTE in 1986. After the Indo-Lanka Accord, the PLOTE called off its armed struggle against the Sri Lankan government, but maintains armed cadres to this day. The Democratic People's Liberation Front (DPLF), PLOTE's 'political wing', holds three seats in the present Parliament, and came second to the EPDP in the 1998 local elections in Jaffna.

The Sri Lankan security forces



The army has always been the most powerful and largest of Sri Lanka's security forces, but its role before the 1980s was largely ceremonial. It reached the height of its public esteem in the south after the recapture of Jaffna in late 1995. Since

May 1997, however, its prolonged and costly campaign to seize the main Jaffna supply route and to flush out the LTTE from the northern Vanni jungles has resulted in significant numbers of desertions. There has rarely been a serious threat of excessive military interference in Sri Lankan government. Nevertheless, the role of the army and the profile of military leaders such as Anuruddha Ratwatte (above) has increased dramatically in recent years, in terms of reporting and defending military operations and with regard to defence procurements. In fighting Tamil nationalists in the north and east and in suppressing the southern insurgency of 1987-89, the Sri Lankan security forces have been responsible for large numbers of extrajudicial killings, 'disappearances', torture and other serious human rights abuses. Internal discipline and civil-military relations have improved significantly, however, under the present administration.

Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC)

The SLMC was established in 1980 to represent predominantly rural, eastern Muslims marginalised from the political process and increasingly caught up in violence between the security forces and Tamil militants. In 1988, the SLMC won almost half the eastern district seats in the ill-fated North East Provincial Council. Since that year, it has also maintained a parliamentary presence and currently holds seven seats from a range of northeastern constituencies. Having entered into the People's Alliance coalition which formed the present government in 1994, M.H.M. Ashraff and other SLMC leaders have backed government policy with regard to the war and peace process and occupied ministerial posts. They have also won concessions in the constitutional reform process, including the promise of a referendum on the formation of a Muslim 'homeland' in south-eastern Ampara district. This latter proposal has caused support for the SLMC to waver among Muslims in other parts of Sri Lanka.

Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO)

The TELO emerged in the mid 1970s. Espousing a narrow nationalism stripped of leftist ideology, it benefited most from the mass recruitment and Indian training of the mid-1980s. Like the PLOTE, however, TELO fell victim to internal feuds and in 1986, large numbers of its cadres were killed by the LTTE. With the Indo-Lanka Accord, TELO was revived and fought with the IPKF and the Tamil National Army. Since India's retreat from Sri Lanka, TELO has maintained a residual armed cadre. Its Colombo leadership has supported the Sri Lankan government, but does not have parliamentary representation.

Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)

The TULF emerged in 1976, bringing together a range of elite Tamil groups, the largest of which was the Federal Party, led by the 'father of Tamil nationalism', Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. Advocating a separate state

of Tamil Eelam, the TULF achieved huge success in the 1977 parliamentary elections and was installed as the official opposition. Through the following years, however, the TULF could not control the militant movement it had helped foster and its inability to hold the government to devolution commitments led to a significant decline in popular support. In 1983, the advocacy of separatism was outlawed and all TULF MPs forfeited their seats. Through the 1980s, the TULF was a prominent participant in the range of ill-fated peace initiatives driven by the Indian government. It returned to Parliament in 1988 and in 1994 presented a manifesto clearly articulating a federal, and not secessionist, Tamil nationalism. The TULF has been a staunch supporter of the current government and holds five parliamentary seats, concentrated in the eastern constituency of Batticaloa. Many analysts believe that the TULF will be a key political force if stable democracy returns to Sri Lanka's north and east.

Political and military participants from the south

Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC)

The CWC is the primary trade union of Sri Lanka's tea estate workers and the main channel of political expression for the 'Up-country' Tamils of the island's central provinces. The CWC emerged from the Ceylon Indian Congress which was founded in 1939. It has been led for many years by S.A.R. Thondaman. Now in his 80s, Thondaman entered Parliament in 1947 and has remained there almost continuously, holding cabinet posts with several governments. The CWC currently has seven MPs. Though elected in alliance with the opposition United National Party (UNP), Thondaman is a minister in the government while his MPs support the ruling People's Alliance on an issue by issue basis. Its role of power broker between the dominant political forces of the

The 1994 parliamentary Election Results

Party	% of vote	No. of seats	Regional distribution
People's Alliance (PA) (includes Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), Communist Party (CP), Desha Vimukthi Janatha Party (DVJP), and factions of the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party (SLMP) and Democratic United National Front (DUNF))	48.9	105	The PA won an absolute majority of seats in 11 out of 22 districts. In Hambantota district in the south, the PA was the largest single party. In Colombo, seats were split evenly with the UNP. The PA won seats in all districts except Jaffna in the north and Trincomalee and Batticaloa in the east.
United National Party (UNP) (includes United National Party (UNP), Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), and factions of the DUNF and SLMP)	44.0	94	The UNP won an absolute majority in 4 out of 22 districts. It was the largest single party in Trincomalee and Ampara districts in the east and shared Colombo seats evenly with the PA. The UNP won seats in every district except Jaffna.
Eelam Democratic People's Party (EPDP)	0.1	9	The EPDP won all but one of the seats for Jaffna district, and no seats elsewhere.
Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) (includes SLMC and Liberal Party (LP) – joined the People's Alliance coalition after registration)	1.8	7	The SLMC won a minority of seats in every district of the Northeast province, but none elsewhere.
Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)	1.6	5	The TULF was the largest party in eastern Batticaloa district. Its other seat was in Trincomalee, also in the east.
Democratic People's Liberation Front (DPLF)	0.1	3	The DPLF was the largest party in the Vanni district in the north, but won no seats elsewhere.
Sri Lanka Progressive Front (SLPF) (includes SLPF and Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP))	1.1	1	The SLPF won a single seat in southern Hambantota district.
Independents (the single independent MP represents the Up-country People's Front (UCPF). The UCPF was formed after registration and has subsequently joined the PA)	2.1	1	The only independent MP was elected from the central Nuwara Eliya district.

south, together with its prominence in a major export industry, has helped the CWC win significant gains for its impoverished Up-country constituency, including a range of labour rights and, most notably, uncontested Sri Lankan citizenship. With Thondaman's approaching retirement, Up-country politics looks set for significant re-alignment with succession disputes, new trade unions and the encroachment of leftist and Tamil nationalist parties already discernible.

Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (People's Liberation Front – JVP)

Fired by limited economic opportunities for educated Sinhalese youth, the JVP led powerful anti-state insurrections in 1971 and 1988. In 1988, they mobilised around Sinhalese fears of Indian imperialism emerging from the Indo-Lanka Accord and the arrival, in the north and east, of an Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF). Within months, they destabilised the entire south of the island, assassinating scores of government representatives and more moderate political rivals. As in 1971, however, the 1988 insurgency was put down ruthlessly by the security forces and its leaders were systematically eliminated. Since then, the JVP has been weak and fragmented. It retains parliamentary representation within the fractious Sri Lanka Progressive Front (SLPF), however, and a strong potential support base among disaffected Sinhalese youth.

The People's Alliance (PA) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)



The PA came to prominence in the southern provincial council elections of March 1994. It includes a range of leftist and minority parties but its primary constituent is the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). The SLFP was in government between 1956-65 and

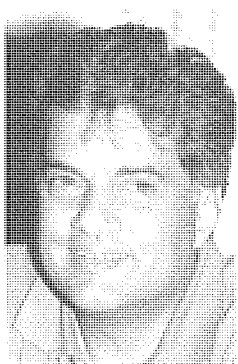
1970-77, and implemented various measures to entrench Sinhala Buddhist interests at the heart of the Sri Lankan state. The PA is led by Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge (below left), daughter of former SLFP presidents S.W.R.D. and Srimavo Bandaranaike, and widow of the charismatic socialist leader Vijaya Kumaratunge, assassinated in 1988 by the JVP. Running on a platform of peace and reconciliation, it won a fragile parliamentary majority in the 1994 elections and opened preliminary peace talks with the LTTE.

Kumaratunge subsequently won the presidential elections with an unprecedented majority, garnering strong support from all ethnic communities. A cessation of hostilities was then agreed with the LTTE but only lasted a few months. Since 1995, the PA government has directed a formidable military assault on LTTE-held areas and developed a constitutional reform 'package', including a range of devolution provisions. The military offensive has proved extremely costly in terms of money and lives. 'The package', meanwhile, has been rejected by the opposition United National Party, while some constituent members of the PA coalition have also voiced opposition.

Sinhala nationalist groups

After four decades wielding considerable political influence, hardline Sinhala nationalists have been relatively marginalised through the 1990s, particularly after the 1994 election victories of President Kumaratunge. Since then, they have developed their ideology within academic and civil society groups such as Jathika Chintinaya and the Sinhala Commission. The latter body, established in December 1996, has rejected the peace package of the current government, but split Sinhala nationalists by embracing the devolution proposals agreed under the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord. The largest political party of hardline Sinhala nationalists is the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP). The MEP gained its first two MPs for 18 years in 1988, but is currently without parliamentary representation.

United National Party (UNP)



The centre-right UNP is currently the main parliamentary opposition party, but has formed the government in Sri Lanka for 30 out of 50 years since independence. Founded in colonial times, the UNP made significant concessions to Sinhala nationalism through the

1950s and 60s, alienating support among the island's other ethnicities. From 1977, it sought to transform Sri Lanka from a corporate socialist state to an export-oriented free market economy and introduced a strong executive presidency under J. R. Jayewardene. In the following decade, it presided over the outbreak of war in the north and east, an alarming increase in extra-judicial state violence, the forceful intervention of India in domestic affairs and a bloody insurrection in the south. From 1988, under President Ranasinghe Premadasa, an informal understanding was forged with the LTTE which hastened the departure of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force. Premadasa did not reach a longer-term accommodation with the Tigers, however, and in 1990, his government launched a brutal, though ineffectual, military assault throughout the north and east. Premadasa was assassinated by the LTTE in 1993, as was Gamini Dissanayake, the UNP presidential candidate, one year later. Presently led by Ranil Wickremesinghe (above), the UNP sits in Parliament in alliance with a handful of smaller parties. It has with-held its support from the peace package of the current government and has published two installments of its own constitutional proposals.

Up-country Peoples' Front (UCPF)

Since the early 1990s, the UCPF has made some inroads into the political hegemony enjoyed among Up-country Tamils by the Ceylon Workers' Congress. Its primary constituency comprises educated, unemployed youths keen to break away from work on the tea estates but

frustrated by discrimination and a lack of opportunity. Impatient of the often feudal nature of the Up-country political establishment, the UCPF hopes to become a significant player in Colombo politics. Since 1994, it has been represented in Parliament by P. Chandrasekaran, originally registered as an independent MP but since signed up to the PA coalition.

Civil society groups

The media

Sri Lanka is a highly literate society with wide access to radio and print media and a well-established televisual industry concentrated around Colombo and the Western Province. Relaying information in Sinhala, Tamil and English, the media have a varied ownership structure and regularly criticise government actions, if typically from narrow ethnically-based perspectives. Nevertheless, government representatives often censor and intimidate journalists, restrictions have severely curtailed the flow of information in and out of war-affected areas while self-censorship has been widespread. The LTTE, for its part, has well-developed structures for information and propaganda which produce and distribute a regular and detailed news service and a selection of videos covering military actions, cultural history and teledrama.

'Peacebuilding' NGOs

Although civil society in the north and east has been seriously depleted by war, migration and the enforced hegemony of the LTTE, there remain a large number of NGOs throughout Sri Lanka working for an honourable settlement to the ethnic/national conflict. In 1994, they were given a boost by the electoral successes of the People's Alliance. Notably muted in the foregoing years, civil society initiatives mushroomed throughout the south, with numerous rallies, peoples' peace delegations, grassroots awareness-raising campaigns, community-based

conflict resolution workshops, and elections and human rights monitoring initiatives. By mid-1995, however, the peace movement was depleted and divided by absorption into the PA administration and the collapse of the government-LTTE peace talks. Civic demoralisation has since spread as both sides to the conflict have resumed hardline, militarist attitudes.

The Sangha (Buddhist clergy)

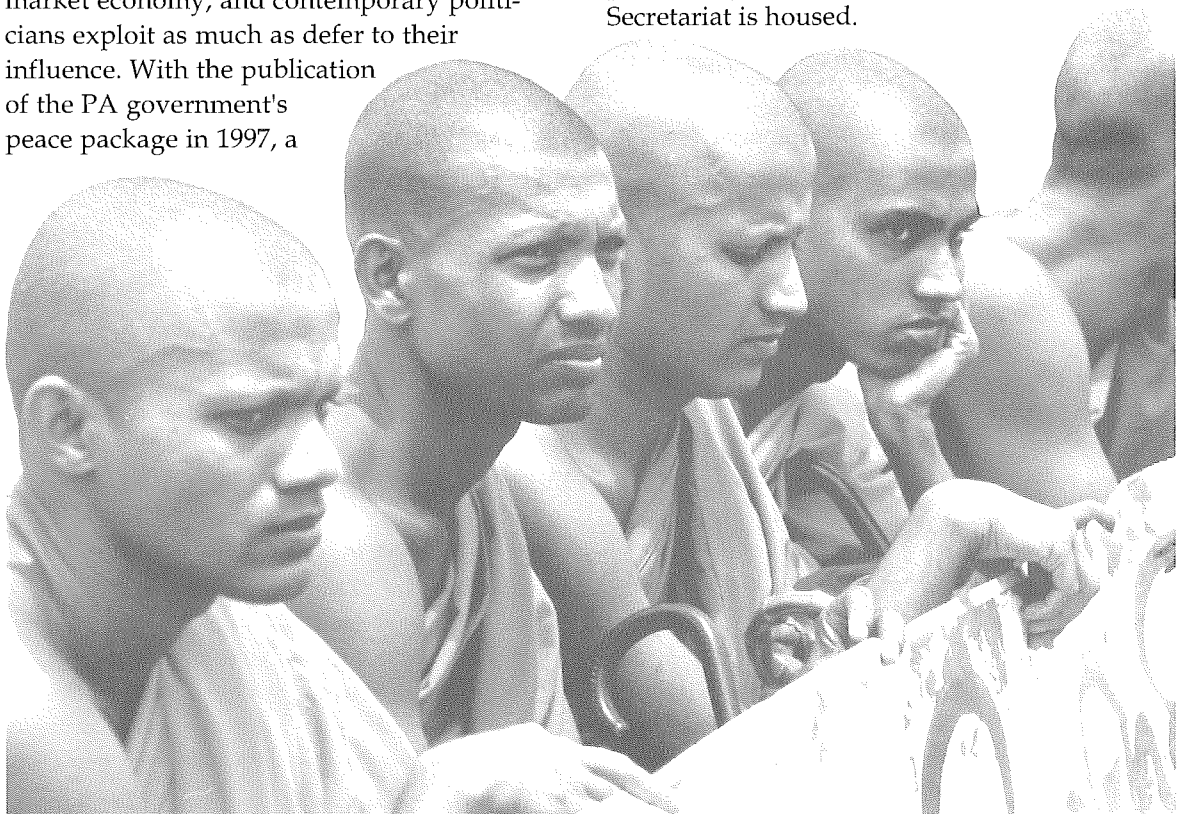
The *Sangha* are highly respected and closely integrated into the life of the Sinhalese community, especially at village level. Through a strict clerical training commencing in childhood, Buddhist monks receive what they consider the sacred trust of Lord Buddha to protect his 'pristine' teachings on the whole of Sri Lanka, the *Dhammadeepa*, the 'island of the just'. With the division of the country traditionally beyond their comprehension, the *Sangha* have played a major role in the politics of Sri Lanka and in shaping opposition to Tamil self-determination. In recent years, the *Sangha's* cultural power has been attenuated by universal modern education and the open market economy, and contemporary politicians exploit as much as defer to their influence. With the publication of the PA government's peace package in 1997, a

significant number of monks came out in favour of devolution. This break from tradition caused unprecedented debate and disagreement among the *Sangha*.

External interveners

European governments

The Scandinavian governments have been particularly persistent in monitoring the Sri Lankan armed conflict and promoting peacemaking initiatives and consultations. Their resultant contact with the LTTE and Tamil nationalist groups has, however, stirred accusations of pro-Tamil bias, particularly against Norway. Together with its Canadian and Dutch counterparts, the Norwegian government dispatched representatives to participate in monitoring committees under the provisions of the 1995 Cessation of Hostilities agreement between the government and the LTTE. Continued disputes between the parties, however, prevented the committees' deployment. In the last year, the Sri Lankan government has stepped up its campaign to have the LTTE banned in European countries, particularly the UK where its International Secretariat is housed.



Young Bhikkus (Buddhist monks) attend a political demonstration in Colombo

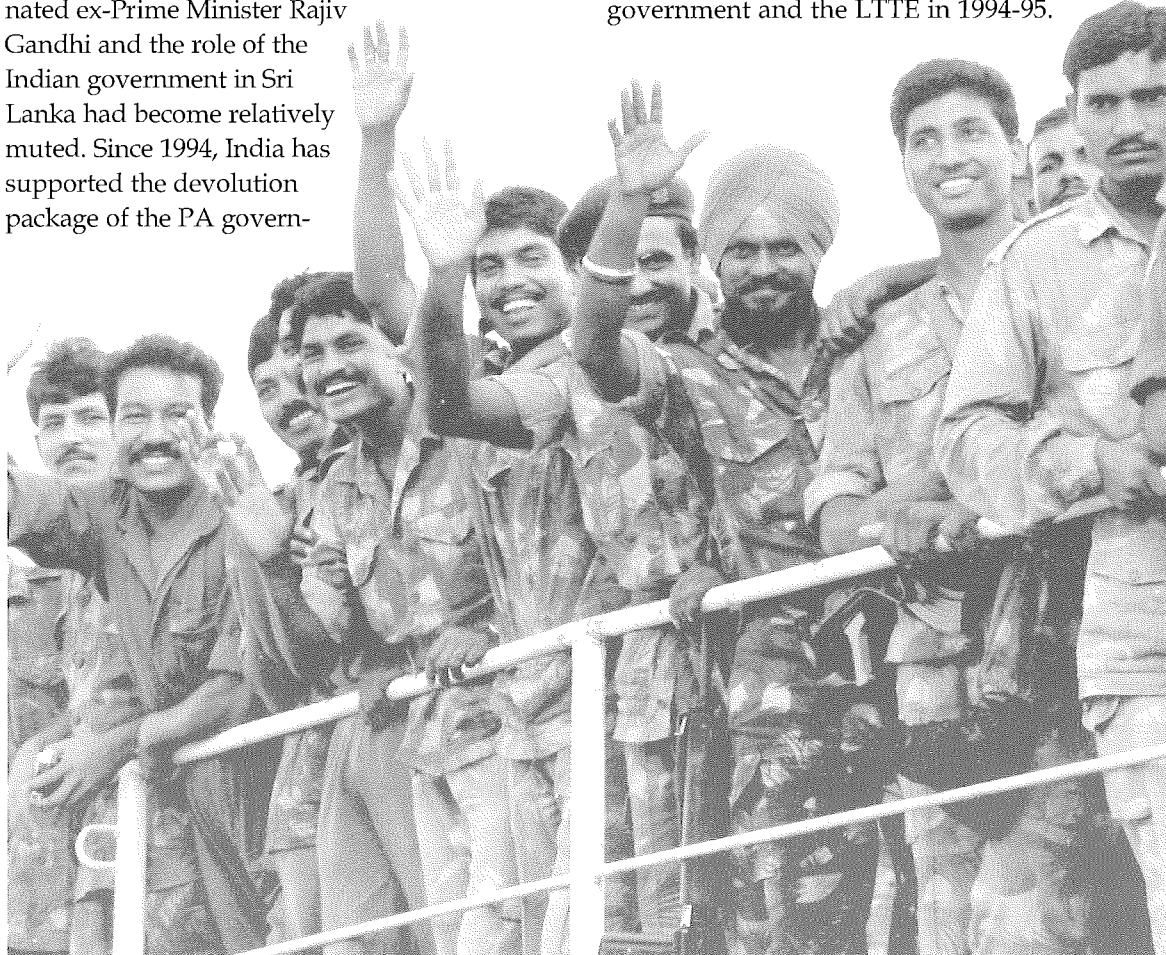
India

The Indian government has sought to defend the civil and political rights of Ceylon Tamils, to secure devolution without stirring separatist demands within its own provinces, and to ward off excessive intervention by rival international powers. While these objectives have remained consistent, India's methods of pursuing them have varied considerably. From 1983, the Indian government trained and armed a range of Tamil militant groups, coerced the militants and the Sri Lankan government into peace talks, sponsored the establishment of a new tier of regional government throughout Sri Lanka and dispatched an Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF) to secure a ceasefire in the island's north and east. By 1989, however, the IPKF was embroiled in a vicious war against the LTTE and domestic and military opposition to the Sri Lankan intervention was growing. With a new Sri Lankan government refusing co-operation, the IPKF was withdrawn in 1990. Within the year, the LTTE had assassinated ex-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the role of the Indian government in Sri Lanka had become relatively muted. Since 1994, India has supported the devolution package of the PA govern-

ment and its international campaign to marginalise the LTTE. It is unclear, however, whether the new government, led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) will continue this policy. Any settlement to the Sri Lankan conflict will need to have the approval, tacit at least, of the Indian government.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The ICRC was admitted to Sri Lanka in 1989 after prolonged campaigning from civil rights groups and considerable resistance from the government. Since that time, it has played its usual role in the country, treating war victims, visiting prisoners and promoting the Geneva Conventions. In the years of the LTTE administration in Jaffna, the ICRC maintained wireless contact with the LTTE, at times the only organisation to do so. It also acted as intermediary for the extensive correspondence between the government and the LTTE in 1994-95.



Soldiers of the Indian Peace-keeping Force (IPKF) leaving Sri Lanka in March 1990

International donors

With its open-door trade policy and general macroeconomic stability, Sri Lanka has proved a relatively co-operative member of both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. However, a broad and efficient tax base, impressive economic development and significant support from the Asian Development Bank, Japan and other bilateral donors mean that national finances are not disproportionately influenced by multilateral institutions. While they have generally remained detached from the course of the armed conflict, international donors have been put under intermittent pressure to impose peace and human rights conditions on their aid, and in the late 80s the Paris group of donors warned the government against its brutal repression of the

southern insurgency. In the early days of the present government, international financial institutions were prevailed upon to assemble a financial package for rehabilitation and reconstruction of the north and east. Negotiations failed before these plans could be implemented.

International NGOs (INGOs)

Many international NGOs operate in Sri Lanka, promoting development, humanitarian relief, human rights, democratic and environmental concerns. A range of international conflict resolution NGOs have also worked both at the political level and for grass roots conciliation. INGOs provide key channels for communication between the war zones and the outside world. Walking a political



Credit: Howard J Davies/Panos Pictures

Five hundred Tamil refugees await registration on Mannar Island after returning from India in March 1995

tightrope between the government and the LTTE, however, they have to stick publicly to the narrowest of humanitarian mandates. A northeast consortium brings together local and international NGOs to share information and co-ordinate work in war-affected areas. Other consortia fulfil similar functions with regard to Sri Lanka as a whole and for humanitarian lobbying.

Sri Lankan diaspora

Pre-war Tamil expatriates tended to be highly educated, financially secure and concentrated in the English speaking countries. After 1983, the Ceylon Tamil diaspora burgeoned and less educated, less westernised refugees spread world-wide, with large numbers settling throughout western Europe, north America and Australia. Generally speaking, these new emigrants are still not poor; the poorest rarely get further than India where there are currently more than 200,000, mostly in camps. Over 700,000 Ceylon Tamils — one-third of Sri Lanka's pre-war Tamil population — are currently refugees. Though the numbers of expatriate Sinhalese are much smaller, there is also a long-established group of expatriate professionals, educated and settled mostly in western, English-speaking countries. These communities were supplemented by new Sinhalese refugees in the wake of the 1971 and late 1980s JVP insurrections. As with many exiled groups, politics abroad are at least as polarised as those at home. Expatriate Tamils continue to provide a large proportion of the finance and propaganda which underpins the LTTE, while Sinhalese abroad are very active in the government's anti-terrorist campaigns.

United Nations

The most active UN agencies within Sri Lanka are the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR has been particularly successful in establishing open relief centres, the largest being at Madhu, west of Vavuniya. Between 1992 and 1995, however, it also assisted with the controversial 'voluntary repatriation' of Tamil refugees from India. The UNDP manages a range of programmes in the northeast, is giving technical assistance to the Sri Lankan government in the rehabilitation of Jaffna and has begun landmine clearing operations in the peninsula. Suggestions of UN involvement in mediation of the Sri Lankan conflict generate an unfavourable public reaction in the south. This is due to a poor understanding of the 'good offices' function of the Secretary General and a belief that Tamil lobbying has undue influence at the UN.

United States

After 1977, US interest in Sri Lanka increased due to the opening up of the Sri Lankan economy and a cooling of relations between the Sri Lankan and Indian governments. Since the end of the cold war, and the gathering rapprochement between the US and India, the potential for US investment in Sri Lanka and the warmth of relations between the US and Sri Lankan governments have further increased. Sri Lanka currently provides a base for Voice of America transmissions while US special forces have trained the Sri Lankan army, even in combat situations. The US government has played an increasingly high-profile role in denouncing the 'terrorist' activities of the LTTE. ■