

From New Delhi by Ramtanu Maitra

Resort to force in Sri Lanka

The Gandhi and Jayewardene governments, facing continued Tamil terrorism, deploy 12,000-strong peacekeeping force.

Under systematic military assault from the Tamil secessionists they are there to disarm, Indian army forces in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka have reluctantly taken the decision to respond with force. At stake is the barely two-month-old Indo-Sri Lankan accord designed to end the warfare between minority Tamil and majority Buddhist Sinhala groups, which has torn this island nation apart for the past four years.

The July 29 peace agreement signed by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lanka's President Junius Jayewardene called for disarming of the Tamil fighters in return for establishment of an autonomous Tamil-dominated province in the northern and eastern part of the island.

Under the agreement, India took the responsibility of disarming the well-armed forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and allied Tamil militant groups. Sri Lankan troops were kept in the barracks. Tamil Tigers who had been imprisoned by the Sri Lankan military were released. President Jayewardene, for his part, took the responsibility of getting parliamentary ratification of the agreement, and in general containing the Buddhist fundamentalists among the Sinhala community.

It was not an easy job. On Aug. 18, a hand grenade was thrown into the Parliament building while Parliament was in session. President Jayewardene escaped the assassination attempt, but a number of his United National Party (UNP) members were injured, and one died. The government has accused the Maoist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the so-called

People's Liberation Front, of masterminding the bombing (see *EIR*, Sept. 25, 1987).

By contrast, the Tamil Tigers' initial response was subdued. There were reports that the Tigers were surrendering arms to the 12,000 Indian troops there to enforce the agreement. But it now appears that the Tigers were only buying time—testing the Indian government's will, on the one hand, while working out a new battle strategy, on the other.

In early October, Tamil terrorists began to spread violence. Sinhalese villagers in Kantalai in eastern Sri Lanka were attacked at night; nine villagers were killed. A Buddhist monk in Trincomalee was murdered, and many Sinhalese villagers, terrified by the indiscriminate killing, began to take shelter in the temples. A mass exodus of Sinhalese ensued from the northern and eastern provinces as villagers moved inland where the Sinhalese are in the majority.

According to some reports, the Tigers massacred about 200 Sinhalese villagers during the first week of October alone.

The decision that force would have to be used to implement the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement was set into motion on Oct. 9. Indian Army Chief of Staff Gen. Krishnaswamy Sunderji and Indian Defense Minister K.C. Pant visited the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo. On the same day, Indian troops arrested 100 Tamils.

At a joint press conference attended by President Jayewardene, K.C. Pant said that orders had gone out to all Indian peacekeeping forces to arrest all persons who engaged in vio-

lence. He reported that General Sunderji had visited the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, and held consultations with the head of India's Southern Command, Deependen Singh, in charge of the peacekeeping force. On Oct. 11, the troops started moving.

On Oct. 12, according to news agency reports, two terrorist bases and two communications centers the Tigers maintained in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu were destroyed. The communications centers were used to direct the fighting in Sri Lanka across the 21-mile-wide Palk Strait.

The following day, Indian troops engaged in heavy fighting in the Batticaloa district in northern Sri Lanka, a stronghold of the Tamil Tigers. According to the Indian spokesman in Colombo, more than 160 Tigers have died in the fighting, and 18 Indian soldiers have been killed, including three commandos shot as they parachuted from helicopters.

According to the Tamil Tigers, 30 Indian paratroopers were killed after they were dropped into Jaffna University on Oct. 12.

The Indian offensive has begun to take a toll on the Tigers, according to a report from Hong Kong. LTTE leader Prabhakaran has appealed to Prime Minister Gandhi to call off the offensive. But, according to sources, there is no question for the Indian army of turning back now.

Meanwhile, Jayewardene, in a broadcast to the nation Oct. 12, alleged that the LTTE and the JVP are working in collusion to overthrow the government. The terrorists have provoked a flood of some 15,000 terrified villagers into Sri Lanka's capital. Jayewardene said the aim of the JVP terrorists is to use these refugees as a base for a mass uprising, and appealed to the refugees not to fall into the trap.