

From New Delhi by Ramtanu Maitra

Britain is harboring Tamil terrorists

Sri Lanka has banned the Tamil Tigers, but the Tigers are enjoying British government support.

In late January, the government of Sri Lanka officially banned the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a Sri Lankan separatist terrorist group. According to Sri Lankan President Mrs. Chandrika Kumaratunga, 1998 will see the end of the 15-year-long violence which has claimed more than 50,000 lives. Yet, the LTTE, better known as the Tamil Tigers, has become extremely active in Britain, from whence the group has long been drawing its support.

On Feb. 1, a few days before Prince Charles arrived in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, "front organizations" for the Tigers "led a 10,000 strong rally of Tamil expatriates to Trafalgar Square in the heart of London," with speaker after speaker advocating more violence, and the creation of a separate Tamil nation, the Indian newspaper *The Pioneer* reported. "Britain . . . has become a safe haven for extremist organizations and individuals, most of them from the Arab world and South Asia. They are believed to mastermind terrorist activities from here and raise millions of pounds to support themselves. All this in full view of the British government," the paper said.

In fact, the Tigers have enjoyed the support of British intelligence throughout the 15 years of violent activities in Sri Lanka, and continue to use London as their base for raising money, buying and shipping weapons via Singapore to their comrades-in-arms back home, and securing intelligence, including that which contributed to their assassinations of Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa and former Indian Prime Minister

Rajiv Gandhi. *The Pioneer* reported, "The Sri Lankan High Commission claims that the LTTE raises £200,000 every month in Britain, to sponsor terrorism back home."

A number of recent events have once again thrust the Sri Lankan situation into the spotlight. On Oct. 8, 1997, the U.S. government listed the LTTE as one of 30 organizations around the world which are banned from the United States under the U.S. Anti-Terrorism and the Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. The LTTE was identified, along with such organizations as Hamas, Harkat-ul-Ansar, and the Basque separatists, as a terrorist outfit.

The timing of the American ban against the LTTE was critical. The Sri Lankan Army had pushed the Tigers to Vanni, the last Tiger bastion within Sri Lanka. But even earlier, in April 1997, the Clinton administration had identified the LTTE as having carried out the most heinous crimes in 1996 (the year under review), in its annual report on global terrorism.

Britain moved quickly on two fronts to provide political cover for the Tigers. In April, as soon it became clear that Washington would label the Tigers as terrorists, and that London would be further exposed as the base from which terrorists and secessionists belonging to Britain's former colonies operate against their duly elected governments, Dr. Liam Fox, British Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, presented Colombo with a proposal to facilitate dialogue among the Sri Lankan parties, including the LTTE. The proposal, known as the "Fox initiative," was designed to strengthen the Tigers, and was endorsed by the

government of British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

This demeaning spectacle of a junior Whitehall bureaucrat of the former colonial ruler, and a nation which is harboring those who are killing recklessly, interceding with the President and the leader of the Sri Lankan opposition in a wholly internal issue, did not go over well. The initiative failed to take off.

But, what also failed, was President Kumaratunga's attempt to get Britain to ostracize the Tigers. And, the terror has continued. On Oct. 15, for example, the Tigers, which have offices in London, sent suicide-bombers to blow up the World Trade Center buildings in Colombo, killing nine. To date, Britain continues to pressure Colombo to open up a dialog with the Tigers.

Prince Charles's visit took place in the midst of all this, and came soon after President Kumaratunga had banned the LTTE. The ban followed the explosion, carried out by the Tigers, near Sri Lanka's holiest Buddhist temple at Kandy. Colombo escalated Army operations against the Tigers, and the Colombo High Court has issued an arrest warrant for LTTE chief V. Prabhakaran.

All this was done within a week of Prince Charles's arrival. Charles's visit to the island was purportedly to celebrate, on Feb. 4, Sri Lanka's 50-year anniversary of independence from British rule. The trip almost was cancelled because of reported "security threats." Also, part of Sri Lanka's majority Sinhala community, angered by British support for the Tigers, had threatened to boycott official functions. They said that the presence of the British monarchy at the golden jubilee celebrations of the nation's independence from Britain, is a pointless revival of sad memories of how the Sinhala-Buddhists had in the past bowed to imperialist Britain.