

SRI LANKAADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT BY PRESIDENT OF SRI LANKA ON
19 February 1987 *

Hon Members,

In my addresses to Parliament in 1984, 1985 and 1986 I have dealt with the unfortunate events that followed the killing of 13 members of the Security Forces in the North, in the Jaffna Peninsula, in July 1983. The Sinhala-Tamil riots in the Southern regions of Sri Lanka that followed saw the terrorist activity in the Northern and Eastern Provinces increase. Up-to-date 4,000 Security personnel and civilians have died in this senseless enterprise. I am tabling a separate document containing a collection of extracts from the above address dealing with the attempts my Government and I have made to arrive at a political solution. I am also annexing as part of this Address the draft proposals made so far. Today I outline the latest phase of that process.

Although the Indian Government succeeded in persuading the Tamil Groups to participate in the 2 rounds of talks at Thimpu in July and August 1985, the Tamil Groups were reluctant to discuss the basic and substantive issues, and resorted to broad rhetorical statements, ultimately staging a walk-out in August 1985.

The Indian government continued its efforts, and invited the Sri Lanka Government delegation to New Delhi for intensive discussions, which finally resulted in a "Draft Terms of Accord and Understanding" being initialled on 30 August 1985; this was accepted as setting out a reasonable basis for negotiation and settlement. There was also initialled at the same time the "Conditions of Implementation", providing for the means of restoring normal civilian administration.

There was no constructive response to the Draft Accord from the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) or the other Tamil Groups. After protracted discussions over a period of several months, an Indian Government delegation led by Minister P. Chidambaram visited Sri Lanka and had discussions in May 1986, and the Government agreed to make concessions beyond the terms of the Delhi Accord. These are embodied in the Proposals dated 04.05.1986.

The Indian Government thereafter persuaded the TULF to have direct negotiations with the Government, which took place in July and August 1986. The Government agreed to further concessions, which were incorporated in the Proposals sent in September 1986. These Proposals included the draft Constitutional Amendments, the draft Provincial Councils Bill, Schedules setting out the Reserved, Concurrent and Provincial Lists, as well as detailed memoranda dealing with Law and Order, Land and Land Settlement and Education. The subjects of Finance and Administration were discussed, but not finalised. The Government believes that, apart from the subjects not finalised these Proposals constituted a package which would have been a reasonable basis of settlement, fair to all sections of the people of Sri Lanka.

2.. ...

In Bangalore during the SAARC Summit Conference in November 1986, these Proposals were discussed by the President of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of India, followed by further discussions at Ministerial level in India and Sri Lanka. Apart from the subjects of Finance and Administration which were not finalised with TULF to have direct negotiations with the Government, which took place in July and August 1986. The Government agreed to further concessions, which were incorporated in the Proposals sent in September 1986. These Proposals included the draft Constitutional Amendments, the draft Provincial Councils Bill, Schedules setting out the Reserved, Concurrent and Provincial Lists, as well as detailed memoranda dealing with Law and Order, Land and Land Settlement and Education. The subjects of Finance and Administration were discussed, but not finalised. The Government believes that, apart from the subjects not finalised these Proposals constituted a package which would have been a reasonable basis of settlement, fair to all sections of the people of Sri Lanka.

In Bangalore during the SAARC Summit Conference in November 1986 these Proposals were discussed by the President of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of India, followed by further discussions at Ministerial level in India and Sri Lanka. Apart from the subjects of Finance and Administration which were not finalised with TULF, the matters which require further clarification, modification and agreement have been fully set out in the Working Paper on Bangalore Discussions, dated 18.11.1986.

In its endeavour to reach a negotiated political settlement, the Government is willing to consider proposals as outlined in relation to these outstanding matters, in the expectation that a final agreement can thereby be achieved.

On Monday the 9 February 1987 the High Commissioner for India Mr. J.N. Dixit handed me the following message "from the Prime Minister and Government of India to His Excellency the President and Government of Sri Lanka":

"1. As far as the current military operations against Tamil civilians continue and other discriminatory measures like economic and communications blockade affecting civilians exist, India is not in a position to resume discussions with Tamil militants. While this is so for the present, India will remain willing to resume the peace process if the when these actions are withdrawn.

2. India is firmly of the view that the proposals which emerged on the 19 December after Mr. Natwar Singh and Mr. Chidambaram's visit to Colombo, must clearly be affirmed by the Government of Sri Lanka as a basis and only a beginning point for further negotiations. India is also of the view that the final framework of a solution based on those proposals can only be forged when Sri Lankan Government and Tamil side come together again for negotiations.

3. If the Government of Sri Lanka continues the economic blockade and military operations against Tamils, prospects of violence will increase. India's assessment is that the conflict will be prolonged and will escalate"

On Friday the 13 February I handed to Mr. Dixit the following reply:

"The response to the Government of India's Message being given below is predicated on the clear understanding that all further discussions to be held or solutions to be evolved shall be within the frame-work of the Independence, Territorial Integrity and Unity of Sri Lanka.

1. If the armed separatists (LTTE) agree to cease armed violent operations and related military preparations and desist from any activity aimed at setting up or interfering with the legal administration of the area, and this is announced by them; the Government of Sri Lanka would ensure that the Armed Forces will not carry out any further military operations in the area during this period.

2. When hostilities cease, in terms of para 1 above, the embargo (ON THE MOVEMENT OF CERTAIN COMMODITIES), now in force in the Jaffna peninsula will be lifted.

If the LTTE is prepared to attend talks with the representatives of the Government of Sri Lanka towards a peaceful solution of the ethnic problem, appropriate talks may be held in New Delhi with the assistance of the representatives of the Indian Government. The Government of Sri Lanka expects the Government of India to underwrite the implementation of any agreement so reached.

3. Upon the armed separatists giving up their arms - a vital step strengthening the civil Administration - a general amnesty will be given to them by the President of Sri Lanka.

4. When talks towards a peaceful solution to the ethnic problem commences the Government of Sri Lanka will release those persons now held in custody under the Prevention of Terrorism Act who have no charges against them.

5. In all these proceedings the mediatory role and the good offices of the Government of India are relevant. The Government of Sri Lanka reaffirms that the results of the discussions held so far, including the proposals of 19 December 1986, will be the basis of evolving a durable solution.

6. The Government of Sri Lanka is agreeable to an early date being fixed for the negotiations."

The Sri Lanka Government has never carried out military operations against civilians nor ever will.

That closes the chapter up to date.

*[The text of this paper was provided by His Excellency Dr Sitra, President of Sri Lanka].