

'Tamils will be finished, dead'

Sri Lanka in grip of new fanaticism

BY ALLEN ABEL
Globe and Mail Correspondent

KANDY, Sri Lanka

At the citadel of Sinhalese Buddhism, two men with rifles stand guard over a holy tooth.

Restlessly they pace the temple balcony, a block away from a green, serene lake. Beyond are the hills that rise to the famous tea plantations of Ceylon and the summit of primordial paradise known still as Adam's Peak.

It is a calming scene, the heart of Sri Lanka, spiritual cradle of its majority tribe.

A young man walks up and identifies himself as one of the masked dancers who jumps around in a nightly tourist show, when there are tourists.

"Civil war coming for sure," the young man says.

"Will you fight?" he is asked.

"If war comes, I'll kill myself," he replies. "Why should I kill somebody else? That's bad karma, man."

It is evening at the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic and the drummers are pounding their drums to announce the nightly exposition of the golden casket that contains the fragment of the Buddha's own person. An older man presents himself as a retired civil servant living on a small pension and tries to sell some worn Imperial coins. He rejects an offer of 2 cents for an Edwardian penny and says, "War will come. We will kill all of them. Tamils will be finished, dead."

If the Liberation Tigers who are fighting for home rule in the north and east of the teardrop island intended to harden Sinhalese enmity, it would seem here that they have succeeded. The insurrection is distant from gracious Kandy, last capital of the old Sinhala kings; the east coast is four hours away by car. But in the minds of the men of the city, the war is here and now.

"It is only a very small island," the coin seller says, and a traveller hears this line repeated over and over in the cities of the Sinhalese. "The Tamil people came from India and they can go back there if they wish. We were here

first.

"Our president is a reasonable Buddhist man. He will give the Tamils their rights, but he will never give them regency. The island is too small for two regencies. It is our island, Sinhala island. In the whole world we have only this place."

In truth, the Sinhalese, descendants of North Indian migrants, have been here for about 2,500 years and the Tamils about three centuries less. They have lived through alternating periods of peace and communal atrocity for centuries, but a new fanaticism and a new arsenal of arms may make this the final confrontation. It is only a small island.

In the heart of Sri Lanka, a visitor goes looking for a voice of moderation and finds more bellicosity instead. Again, the same argument: "There are 80 million Tamils in India, but our language is spoken nowhere else on earth. This is our island. Where can we go? Our backs are to the sea."

The speaker is a 74-year-old anglophile Christian Sinhalese barrister named Edmund Frederick Lorenz de Silva, MBE, former mayor of Kandy, member of parliament and ambassador to Switzerland and France.

Mr. de Silva owns the Chalet Hotel on a cliff above the town. He says he has been losing about \$2,000 a month since the terrorists scared away the tourists.

"We Sinhalese are like Latins," Mr. de Silva

says, embedded in an armchair in his study. "We are very volatile. Our president's biggest problem is to keep the Sinhalese at bay.

"You see, there are three million Tamils but only one million of them live in Jaffna, where they are the majority. The rest are scattered among us. I have 10 Tamils working for me here. My son-in-law is a Tamil. They are living among us. My God, we could wipe them out overnight."

Mr. de Silva sees global machinations behind the current unrest. He looks to Rajiv Gandhi, a nonentity only a year ago, as the key player today, and to India, vilified here since the riots of 1983 as the source of Tamil terrorism, as the only possible mediator.

The acceptance of the Indian Prime Minister as an honest broker is a major shift by the Sri Lankan Government, which still holds up the threat of all-out warfare should negotiations break down again.

"Rajiv will work it out," the old statesman says. "He has an agreement with the Russians. The Russians realize that it is in India's interest to help Sri Lanka, otherwise the Americans will move in.

"Our Government is committed to a political solution. It cannot afford open warfare — already the bill for armaments has gone from 1 per cent to 10 per cent of our budget. But we have to show these Tamils we mean business."

The ex-mayor thinks that Sri Lanka is getting a bad press internationally. (The recent ban on foreign reporters should help ensure that it gets no press at all.)

Kandy is safe as a baby's crib, he asserts, but what is happening on the east coast, which is closed to all aliens, is another, unknowable, story.

"It has always been the plan of the terrorists to rouse the Sinhalese to kill Tamils," he says. "But this is giving Sri Lanka a bad image abroad. It is very sad. Now the priests are telling the people that they must follow the tenets of their religion. Violence only begets violence."

Four killed in Sri Lanka

Reuter

COLOMBO

Tamil separatist guerrillas killed four people in Sri Lanka on Monday and tied their bodies to lamp posts, the national news agency Lankapuvath said yesterday.

It said the killings occurred in northern Jaffna and eastern Batticaloa districts. Security sources said guerrillas sentenced Tamils who did not support their fight for a separate Tamil state to what they described as lamp-post killings.