



KUMARAGE & CO. LTD.
446, Old Moor Street,
234, Bandaranayake Mawatha,
Colombo 12.
☎ 438594-26337-447075-445757

The Island

Monday 5th October, 1992 Registered in Sri Lanka as a Newspaper

Resolution of N-E conflict

APC suspends talks to clear way for PSC

by Suresh Mohamed

The All Party Conference (APC) has suspended discussions on the crucial North-East conflict to avoid complications as the Parliamentary Select Committee is continuing deliberations to evolve a consensus settlement to this issue. "We, quite rightly decided that parliament should take pride of place in this whole exercise aimed at resolving the North-East crisis", APC Chairman, Justice and Higher Education Minister A. C. Shahul Hameed declared yesterday.

All documents and material which could be of use to the Select Committee have been made available to it by the APC, the Minister said.

"We thought it was not correct to hold deliberations on the North-East problem on two different fora. Such a dual process of discussion could have led to complications. That is why we have suspended APC talks on this vital issue and cleared the way for the Parliamentary Select Committee to take over," Mr. Hameed told *"The Island"*.

Asked whether the APC, as a whole had wound up, the Minister replied in the negative. "I wish to say an emphatic 'no' to that. The APC must not be viewed as an institution with a constitution. One must not look at it that way. The APC was born as a result of certain stresses brought on the system. It was those circumstances which gave birth to the APC. It has not run a continuous, uninterrupted course. It is correct

that the APC had not met for the past one month. The reason for that is I am trying to get some consensus among party leaders as to how often they should attend and how often the plenary must meet and on the role of the Committee," he stressed.

Minister Hameed further said: "On the other issues before the APC I am wondering whether how often party leaders must meet and how often the plenary should meet and at what point we should take up matters before the plenary." He explained that a date to convene the next APC session will be fixed by him shortly.

"That will be done in the very near future. I will be meeting party leaders for discussions on this. How often the plenary meets is very vital. It is not correct to say the APC is dead. It can be re-activated when the necessity arises. The main role of the APC was to make a joint search for a solution to the North-East conflict. With the appointment of the Parliamentary Select Committee, we decided to give pride of place to it and halt APC discussions on the North-East question," Mr. Hameed observed. The APC was appointed in September 1989.

Meanwhile SLMC leader M. H. M. Ashraff responding to the demand by Tamil political parties and groups for the permanent amalgamation of the Northern and Eastern Provinces declared that his party was totally opposed to any 'unconditional permanent merger of the

two provinces'.

"If they (the Tamil parties and groups) want a permanent merger, it is upto them to remove the fears of the Sinhala and Muslim minorities living in the North-East. There are no specific safeguards for the Sinhalese and Muslims offered by the Tamil parties. The SLMC has always called for a separate council which reflects the aspirations of the Muslims in the North-East. A similar institutional arrangement must be made for the Sinhala community as well," he said.

Mr. Ashraff pointed out that it was upto the Tamil parties to offer the necessary safeguards to the minority communities. It was they who wanted a permanent merger and it was left for them to do the needful. "We will cooperate. What they are offering now is a council which may satisfy Muslims living in the Sammanthurai-Kalmunai and Pottuvil electorates. It will not in any way satisfy Muslims living in other parts of the North-East. We cannot accept something which is unacceptable to the larger interests of all Muslims living in the North and East. The SLMC will oppose any political arrangement which is not satisfactory to the Muslims", the SLMC chief declared. He said his party was open for discussions on this matter. Any 'unconditional permanent merger' will not be accepted. The SLMC will never support such an arrangement.