

Ball squarely in LTTE court for political solution. (1993, October 18). *Daily News*.

## PM tells US officials: Peace but for odd Tiger out 'Ball squarely in LTTE court for political solution'

From Aziz Haniffa in Washington

Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has ended his first round of talks with senior Clinton administration officials and Congressional leaders on an upbeat note.

In an exclusive interview with the *Daily News*, Wickremesinghe said that the discussions were 'very friendly', and had 'gone off very well', with a clear appreciation of Sri Lanka's resilient democracy in the face of several recent upheavals.

"I explained to them that President Wijetunga is carrying on the same policies and our desire is to improve relations with the United States", he said.

Wickremesinghe over the past two days since his arrival here on a week long visit, has met Secretary of State Warren Christopher, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, World Bank President Lewis Preston, and several members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee among others.

Wickremesinghe acknowledged that the human rights question and the need for a political solution to the crisis in the north, had kept recurring in his meetings with the US officials and legislators on Capitol Hill, 'they brought it up and we explained the steps that we have taken and the improvement in the human rights situation in Sri Lanka', he said.

Wickremesinghe said that he had made it clear to those whom he met 'the fact that we were a democracy under siege'.

### Democratic process

He said that with regard to Washington's call for the need for a political solution to the conflict with the LTTE, he had informed them that 'we always believe in the democratic process and all the Tamil parties and groups other than the LTTE are in this process.

"So what we have is one group that is standing outside. So they should renounce violence and join the process. Wickremesinghe said that there was certainly a role for the LTTE in the negotiating process. They should renounce violence' and come into the democratic process, (because) in a democratic process, you can talk of anything you want, of any problems you have.

He said that 'if the LTTE has any questions that they want to discuss, not only the government, but also all the other parties would be willing to discuss, provided they rejected violence'.

Wickremesinghe said that such discussions could even include changes to the constitution because it requires the consent of all parties in parliament, and we haven't got a two-thirds majority.

### Continuing intransigence

The Prime Minister said that the ball was now squarely in the LTTE's court, and remarked that he had informed the US officials of this, saying that the LTTE's actions and continuing intransigence were 'one of terror and terror practised mainly against the Tamils in the northern part of Sri Lanka and against the Tamil parties'.

Meanwhile, on relations between India and Sri Lanka, Wickremesinghe said that they couldn't be better and predicted that the growing political and economic ties would continue unabated.

He declared that 'We've got excellent relations with Prime Minister Rao and his government and I can't see any problems.

Wickremesinghe, who recently visited New Delhi and met Rao and other senior officials, said a catalyst in the improving ties between the two countries was the growing rapport between Sri Lanka's new President D.B. Wijetunga and Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. 'The two heads of government get

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on quite well and we have no major problems,' he said.

He envisaged bilateral trade between India and Sri Lanka would continue to increase and also said that Colombo would like to be a partner with India in postering intra-regional trade among South Asian countries.

Currently, according to Wickremesinghe, 'the trade balance is very much in favour of India, but we've been talking to them about liberalising the trading system between our two countries.'

He noted that there's also the SAKPTA (South Asia Preferential Trading Association) that's being pursued by Sri Lanka, that will cover the South Asian community.'

Wickremesinghe said that New Delhi 'agrees that they should do something to correct the imbalance which runs into a few billion rupees in their favour.'

Wickremesinghe also indicated that Sri Lanka saw no problems in exchanging intelligence information about the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) with India, although he refused to say if LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran would be extradited to India if apprehended.

'There has been an exchange of information,' he said, 'and the Indians came down to Sri Lanka to investigate the Rajiv Gandhi murder and there has been no bar on it'.

'(But) in general' Wickremesinghe said, 'the decision is that each country will look after the problem on their side.'

He remarked that 'India is combating it on their side and Sri Lanka is combatting it on our side.'

When pressed on whether Prabhakaran would be extradited to India if apprehended, Wickremesinghe replied: 'let's first apprehend him.'

He dismissed the contention that Prabhakaran, was calling the shots in the island's north and northeast provinces. 'He doesn't call the shots,' Wickremesinghe asserted, 'but he hasn't been apprehended either, that's a process that's left to the security forces and others as they go along.'

Asked if Sri Lanka was willing to cooperate with India to apprehend Prabhakaran, the prime minister hinted at the possibility that the LTTE leader may be hiding out in India, saying, 'if he's in India, they will apprehend him, (and) if he's in Sri Lanka, it's left to the Sri Lankan forces to apprehend him.'