

Britain ready to help Lanka in peace process. (1994, November 18). *The Island.*

Britain ready to help Lanka in peace process

THE ISLAND
18.11.94

British Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State of the Foreign and Commonwealth office and Minister responsible for South-Asian relations Tony Baldry, MP said on Tuesday that "Britain stood ready to offer any assistance" which Sri Lanka "might find useful in the process of peace or in reconstruction and rehabilitation. Paying a courtesy call on the Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar. Mr. Baldry congratulated the Government on its convincing victory in the recent

presidential election and conveyed a message to President Kumaratunga from Prime Minister John Major. In a general discussion of bilateral relations it was agreed that ties between Great Britain and Sri Lanka were excellent. The Foreign Minister welcomed this initiative by a British Minister to visit Sri Lanka so soon after the election. In a discussion of the North and East problem and the initiatives undertaken by the new Government since it came to power in August, Minister Kadirgamar stressed that the Government was determined to press forward with the peace process although no timetable had yet been decided for the resumption of the peace talks themselves.

Mr. Baldry had formal talks at the MFA with State Minister for Foreign Affairs, D. P. Wickramasinghe. The Minister was accompanied by senior MFA officials. The Sri Lankan side explained the energetic steps being taken to transform the human rights situation in Sri Lanka in a manner which it was hoped would favourably impress the international community at the next meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in 1995. Economic relations between the two countries were reviewed, including trade and projects and bilateral aid which had recently been the topic of inter-governmental talks in Colombo.

Under international relations, the Sri Lankan side described developments and prospects in SAARC and the new Government's desire to develop relations with Asian countries as well as the West. Both sides noted favourably the recent conclusion of a new Cooperation Agreement between Sri Lanka and the European Union. Cooperation in the international

fight against drug trafficking was reviewed and a number of specific legal issues touched upon. Mr. Baldry, together with the visiting FCO officials and

members of the British High Commission in Colombo, were guests of the Sri Lankan Government at a dinner hosted by State Minister D. P. Wickramasing-

he on 15 November which was attended by a number of ministers and senior officials. The same day Mr.

[Contd. on Page 3]

Britain ready....

[Contd. from Page 1]

Baldry visited the British High Commission offices and was briefed by members of the staff on aspects of its work including visa matters. Mr. Baldry also met representatives of INGOs and NGOs active in Sri Lanka including those British NGOs working in relief and rehabilitation in conflict affected areas.

On November 16 Mr. Baldry was received by Justice and External Trade Minister G. L. Peiris for a discussion

which covered the Government's approach to solving the

North and East problem, human rights and trade. Mr. Baldry mentioned, particularly, the interest which had been expressed by many British firms to be involved in infrastructural projects connected with Sri Lanka's economic development including privately financed projects. Mr. Baldry was the guest of Anil Moonesinghe, Deputy Speaker, at a

lunch given at Parliament. Mr. Baldry was able to meet a number of senior leaders on this occasion and called separately on the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Ranil Wickremasinghe, at Parliament for a wide ranging discussion of recent developments.

On 16 November Mr. Baldry was taken to Vavuniya on a flight by the Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF). Mr. Baldry received a briefing on the military situation

Area Military Commander and visited the crossing point at Tandikulam where he spoke to a number of people crossing from the North. Mr. Baldry also visited a UNHCR camp accommodating refugees which had returned from India. This UNHCR programme is funded in part under the British aid programme. Mr. Baldry also visited a re-settlement area where he met villagers and was briefed by officials on the re-settlement programme.