

# Constitutional crisis deepens

SRI LANKA'S parliamentary Speaker Anura Bandaranaike has put off a foreign tour amid a deepening constitutional crisis after the Supreme Court issued a ban on him, reported AFP quoting officials on Saturday.

Bandaranaike who was due to leave for London later Saturday delayed his travel plans amid fears that the ruling party may pull off a surprise in his absence, parliamentary sources said.

"A state attorney had appeared on behalf of the speaker without his consent and agreed to a Supreme Court order restraining him from proceeding with an impeachment of the chief justice," a parliamentary official said.

He said under the circumstances, Bandaranaike feared that his absence would leave room for the ruling party to manoeuvre and even reject the impeachment resolution against the chief justice.

Ruling party stalwarts, however, said they were opposed to the Supreme Court's interference with the legislature while making it clear that they were prepared to block opposition attempts to remove Chief Justice Sarath Silva.

The battle between parliament and the Supreme



Anura Bandaranaike

Court began after the opposition Wednesday tried to begin impeachment proceedings against the chief justice who is a personal appointee of the president. The Marxist JVP, or People's Liberation Front, joined forces with the right-wing United National Party (UNP) to hand a petition to parliamentary speaker Bandaranaike charging Silva with misconduct, including adultery.

But on the same day, the Supreme Court, which is also appointed by the government, issued an interim order preventing the speaker from setting up a panel to investigate the allegations. The full case will be heard on September 3.

Bandaranaike is expected

to give a ruling on whether he will abide by the Supreme Court or will press ahead with the impeachment inquiry when parliament resumes sitting in 10 days.

The opposition Thursday made use of a routine debate to assert parliament's authority and criticised the Supreme Court's move to block impeachment proceedings. Behind closed doors, ruling party MPs objected to the controversial order, causing a rift within the already shaky coalition of President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

On May 28 the Supreme Court rejected a case in which three petitioners, including two journalists, had demanded the removal of the chief justice. The rejection was issued partly on the basis that the removal of judges can only be done through an impeachment process in parliament.

But on Wednesday, the three-judge bench, which included two judges who heard the May 28 case, issued the order against the speaker on the basis that parliament could not investigate judges. "This clearly shows the duplicity of the state attorney general. Can we have any faith in a legal system like this?" opposition legislator Rajitha Senarathne asked parliament.



**Gunboat diplomacy:** The Sri Lankan navy is set to take delivery of the first fast attack craft out of an order for four placed with Israel last year, AFP said Sunday, quoting press reports. A Sri Lankan navy delegation was currently in Israel to accept the first "Shaldag-class" vessel that will be deployed for patrolling the island's north-eastern waters in the battle against the Liberation Tigers. The Sunday Island newspaper said the vessel is one of four ordered in August last year. The government boosted its defence budget by an estimated 400 million dollars last year to acquire new military hardware to stall a rolling offensive by the Tigers.

## World bank provides \$130m for Lanka

THE WORLD Bank has allocated 100 million U.S. dollars for the infrastructure development of Sri Lanka's state universities, the official Daily News said on Friday. Two days earlier the World Bank said that it plans to grant a loan of \$30 million toward the recently initiated restructuring of Sri Lanka's central bank.

Minister of Education and Information Technology Indika Gunawardena said on Thursday that the \$100 million University infrastructure grant will be used for improving university libraries, research units, auditoriums, hostels and curriculum development in the war-torn country.

The restructuring will

keep universities in the country up with global trends, he said. The minister gave the lie to rumors that state universities were to be privatized. He said the cabinet had decided that all universities would remain under the aegis of the state.

Speaking about the loan to the central bank, Sriyani Hulugalle of the World Bank

office in Colombo told Dow Jones Newswires "final negotiations have been completed and the loan package will be going to the board this month."

Hulugalle said the proposed \$30 million four-year loan should be available from July.

The Central Bank of Sri

Lanka has embarked on a restructuring with its key objective of using monetary policy to contain inflationary pressures. The reorganization will see the bank focus on ensuring domestic price stability within a flexible exchange rate mechanism. After the changes the bank will gradually shed some of its other roles.

## No confidence motion looms as UNP gathers allies

SRI LANKA'S main opposition, United National Party, last Friday collected nearly 60 signatures from its members for a no confidence motion against the government. The UNP says the Peoples Alliance government led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga has no moral authority to rule. The motion will be presented this week to parliament.

The UNP says it is confident the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) will support the motion. The party is certain the motion of no confidence will gather momentum once the parliamentary debate on the issue begins and that members from the coalition Peoples Alliance will also lend support.

Meanwhile, both the opposition and members of

the ruling party will challenge a Supreme Court ruling which issued a Stay Order on Speaker Anura Bandaranaike from appointing a Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) to probe allegations of mis-conduct and adultery against the Chief Justice.

Deputy Speaker Sarath Munasinghe told Bandaranaike that the Speaker should not entertain the Stay Order as it violates the supremacy of Parliament and its legislators.

Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and D. M. Jayaratne were Friday given a copy of the letter initiated by the opposition parties to gather signatures calling upon the Speaker to ignore the court ruling and appoint a PSC to study the impeachment motion against Chief Justice Sarath N. Silva.

Meanwhile, a rift in Sri Lanka's ruling coalition widened last week over a

pledge which a key Muslim ally said President Kumaratunga had made. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), which holds the balance of power in the hung Parliament, said Kumaratunga had back-pedalled on a promise to create a separate administrative district for minority Muslims in the island's east. The SLMC controls 11 of the Parliament's 225 seats.

"It was the President who said arrangements for the new district would be finalised by the end of May. That deadline has not been met," said the SLMC's R. Sinnalabbe, a lawmaker of Kumaratunga's Peoples' Alliance (PA). "This development casts serious doubts on our agreement with the PA," Sinnalabbe said. He added that the dispute would be decided when government parliamentarians meet Kum-aratunga later. "It's really now up to the President," he added.

Several rounds of high-level negotiations between Colombo and New Delhi were held last year to secure the release of scores more, as relatives of the jailed fish-

## Lanka, India deal over fishermen

SRI Lanka and India are examining a proposal to exchange fishermen arrested for poaching in each other's territorial waters in a bid to untangle a long-standing bilateral issue, the India Abroad News Service said quoting a government official.

The suggestion to free the fishermen was made by Fisheries Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa during a visit to New Delhi last week when he met with Agriculture Minister Nitish Kumar and senior officials there.

"The minister made the request and the details have to be worked out now," said fisheries ministry secretary S. Amarasekara. He said some 72 Sri Lankan fishermen who were arrested by the Indian coast guard are behind bars in coastal towns like Kochi, Rameswaram and Tuticorin.

Several rounds of high-level negotiations between Colombo and New Delhi were held last year to secure the release of scores more, as relatives of the jailed fish-

ermen grew increasingly restive and mounted protests in Colombo demanding government action.

The northern area navy commander Upali Ranaweera said during recent talks with his counterpart from Tamil Nadu, he was told to arrest some of the hundreds of trespassing fishermen.

In Sri Lanka, some 47 Indians who had crossed the maritime boundary between the two countries to fish were nabbed by the navy in the last three weeks.

The area, rich in shellfish like prawns, has been out of bounds to local fishermen for security reasons with the military alleging that smugglers posing as fishermen bring supplies from the Indian mainland to the Liberation Tigers.

Ministry official Amarasekara also said India was mulling over a proposal made by Sri Lanka to define a safe path through Indian waters that the island's fishermen could traverse with impunity.

## Poor response to drive for more Buddhist monks

THE SRI Lankan government has postponed a special full moon day ordination of Buddhist monks after only a little over half the number expected answered advertisements calling for applicants, said the India Abroad News Service last week.

Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake last month launched an unprecedented advertising campaign calling for 1,000 candidates to swell the ranks of the Buddhist clergy.

Wickremanayake, who also wanted lay sponsors to help with donations to maintain the monks, said the monks would be ordained on Poson Poya, falling on Tuesday and marking the day Buddhism came to Sri Lanka.

The mass ordination was put off, however, with only some 671 aspirants applying. "We will have a ceremony to hand them over to temples but the ordination itself will take place later," said a spokesman for the ministry of Buddhist Affairs which comes within the prime minister's purview.

Boys, some as young as eight-years-old, were ordained as monks. The boys, aged between eight and 15, were shaved and bathed by senior monks at a temple in the town of Ingiriya, 60 kilometres (37 miles) southeast of here, as a token of Wickremanayake's ambitious plan. The move to advertise for monks drew murmurs of protest from members of the Buddhist clergy and laymen who objected to the prime minister's short circuiting the strict process of choosing

aspirants. Wickremanayake said he was responding to "reports of various conspiracies to prevent the forward march of Buddhism."

With only 39,000 monks to administer to some 13.7 million Buddhists in the island, he said it was his duty to help replenish the dwindling numbers, which have caused a shortage of younger monks to take over from older chief priests.

Despite the shortfall in volunteers to take up saffron robes, there was a good response from donors to finance the up-keep of the young men who are prepared to lead the celibate life of a monk.

"The prime minister has received pledges from over 1,000 people who are willing to pay over 1,000 rupees (11 dollars) a month for the up keep of each monk," Wickremanayake's spokesman, Seelarathne Senarath said. "The prime minister will undertake a co-ordinating role so that donors will be able to finance monks

from their own home towns," Senarath said.

In April, Sri Lanka's Supreme Court rejected a petition by a Buddhist monk who argued that his fundamental rights had been violated because the government failed to provide him with a job. The court said university graduate, Rupaha Pemana-nda, should be spreading the message of Buddha, rather than seeking state employment.

"If a monk wants employment he can give up the robes and take up a lay job," Chief Justice Sarath Silva said. But many monks have left the order, with some even joining the military as foot soldiers.

"This is not something that can be done like recruiting for the army," said Venerable Thini-yawala Palitha, chief monk at Colombo's Nalandaramaya temple about the failed recruitment drive. "We agree there is a shortage.... But you cannot rush it."

## Ranil, Jayalalitha in cordial talks

LEADER of the Opposition, Ranil Wickremesinghe met Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, J. Jayalalitha and had a cordial discussion on Monday, last week, the Island newspaper reported, when the newly elected AIADMK leader had called for an urgent, peaceful solution to Sri Lanka's conflict.

Miss Jayalalitha pointed out that vast number of lives and a huge amount of prop-

erty have been destroyed due to the North East conflict and according to information she had more than 68,000 lives have been lost to the war. Under the circumstances an urgent, peaceful solution was a must, she added. Mr. Wickremesinghe appraised the Chief Minister of the talks he had with the Indian Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs in New Delhi on the current sit-

uation in the North East of Sri Lanka. The stand taken by the central government of India as well as the United National Party was that a political solution must be found to the ethnic problem within a united Sri Lanka while safeguarding the territorial integrity of the country.

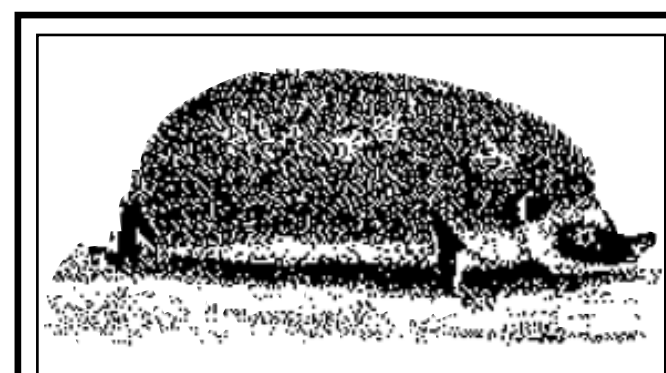
Talking about the difficulties confronted by the Indian fishermen who fish near the Palk Strait, she requested

Mr. Wickremesinghe to draw the attention of the Sri Lankan authorities on this issue. Mr. Wickremesinghe told her that he would take up the matter with the Minister of Fisheries once he returned. The Chief Minister pointed that the domestic tea trade in Tamil Nadu has been severely affected as a result of unrestricted access of tea made in Sri Lanka. In response Mr. Wickremesinghe told her

that a remedy could be found under the bilateral trade agreements signed between the two countries. It would be highly beneficial to both countries if Sri Lanka and India took a combined effort to monopolize the global tea market. It would also help to tackle the problems facing the trade, Mr. Wickremesinghe said. The Sri Lankan opposition spent a week in India.



Servant: A main Buddhist monk blesses Wickremesinghe



### POINTS TO PONDER

#### Raising Standards

The level of political debate inside and outside Sri Lanka's zoo-like Parliament continues to plumb new depths. Not content with brandishing slippers at opponents, the island's so-called elected representatives have now taken to the pages of the press to slander, defame and generally do down

their opponents as opposed to policies. The latest offender - Minister S.B. Dissanayake, a close associate of President Kumaratunga, who called Muslim Congress leader and PA minister Rauf Hakeem "a diabolical liar" in an interview with published in a leading newspaper. "Hakeem says one thing in the cabinet and empties a barrage of dia-

bolical lies outside the cabinet," he said. Seemingly on a roll Dissanayake, makes some political capital out of recent Sinhala-Muslim ethnic clashes. Referring to the Mawanella clashes, he said Minister Hakeem had tried to cash in from the unrest although he has no power base there. "He is fishing in troubled waters to build a foundation for him there." Got any more rope for the Minister to hang himself with?

#### Chain Reaction

Wow - those UNP boys, and girls, really know how to motivate their rank and file in a time of crisis. Take, for example, the recently-tabled no-confidence motion against the government. Party sources said they plan to bring at least 1 million protesters to Colombo to

coincide with the motion. Not content with leaving it there, the UNP plan is to organise seven large human chains to cover all key entrances to the City on the day of the motion. "We will see that one chain spreads as long as 7 miles," said an organizer. It's likely that the motion will be tabled before the end of the month - which gives organizers plenty of time to plan their human chain. Rest assured, the party will be rooting out the weakest links.

#### Breaking Bread

We bid a fond farewell to the CEB's outgoing K Gnanalingam who will relinquish his position as Director General. The state-controlled CEB has been no stranger to controversy, with accusations of mismanagement, fraud and corruption abounding. Nonetheless, the amiable

Mr Gnanalingam - in a distinct minority of CEB officials who have kept their hands clean - leaves with an unblemished record. With this in mind, it came as no surprise that he refused to break bread with other senior officials, accused of corrupt practices, who were invited to a leaving dinner hosted by the Chairman in Mr Gnanalingam's honour. The farewell lunch became a non-event, after the DG told the chairman that he would not have a meal with "dirty crooks," reports said. Such integrity will be sorely missed.

#### Stand By Your Man?

Confusion appears to reign in the household of one prominent PA politician who shall remain nameless. In a recent newspaper interview, his estranged wife painted a self-portrait of a strong

woman responsible for moulding the successful politician he was today. "She had stated that it was she who looked into all his needs and kept a tidy house since the VIP being a simple man was very particular about a clean house," reports said.

The full-page article, however, didn't go down at all well with those who are close to the politician. The newspaper received several calls from his friends who pointed out who was actually co-habiting with him.

#### In Session

It may be recalled that Sri Lanka had the greatest number of holidays in a year possibly in the entire world. Now, here's another possible entry in the record books - the astounding number of political commissions and

committees in Sri Lanka's political life. "Sri Lanka might get a place in the Guinness book of world records for having the highest number of committees and commissions to probe anything and everything at the mere drop of a hat," The Sunday Times pointed out. "The endless number of committees and commissions is so much that no one knows the exact number of these commissions and committees." The latest is a committee appointed to look into the soaring cost of living. In the light of such ponderous entities, The Sunday Times feels it may be more appropriate to convene a committee looking at the cost of dying - as any conclusion the committee draws may come as too late for the people suffering under the burden of increasing austerity.

#### Uniform blues

Sri Lanka's Deputy Minister Mervyn de Silva is not one to hide his light under a bushel. He recently admitted publicly - in an interview to the BBC, no less - that he has his own unofficial "police" to deal with any situation. The matter was raised when Silva was accused of using his henchmen to attack the UNP deputy mayor and several others in Colombo. Police said that "blows were traded both by the UNP and the PA" in which some 15 persons were wounded.

In fact, the helpless UNPers were purely on the receiving end. Furthermore, the policemen - official ones, in this case - also hit protesters who were mainly UNP members. Understandably Silva couldn't understand what the fuss was about.