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# Japan mulls banning the LTTE also

JAPAN is seriously considering taking 'tangible measures' against the Tamil Tigers, IANS reported this week, widely interpreted as a proscription of the LTTE.

But before that, Japan's special envoy to Sri Lanka, Yasushi Akashi, will travel to the island to see if Colombo and the Tigers can return to the negotiating table, the Indian news agency said.

Akashi, 75, whose visit will take place in August, would very much like to meet the LTTE leader, Velupillai Pirapaharan, to know first hand what the latter's thoughts are on the fractured peace process. Akashi could not meet the LTTE chief during his previous trip in May.

'Yes, I would like to meet (Mr.) Pirapaharan,' Akashi said in a 90-minute interview to IANS at his office in the heart of Tokyo. Describing the Tamil leader as a 'man of conviction' Akashi said: "Only he (Pirapaharan) can take

the most difficult decisions."

Asked about the likely meeting, Akashi said: 'I would like to convey (to him) that the Japanese government is on the verge of some important decision as I have described to you.'

He added: 'we are seriously considering tangible measures as some other governments have taken.'

He did not explain what the 'important decision' or 'tangible measures' would be, but it is widely interpreted as a proscription of the LTTE as a terrorist group.

The European Union and Canada separately proscribed the LTTE earlier this year.

"Before taking such a decision, I would like to make a trip to Sri Lanka to ascertain whether there is some hope for the parties to turn back from the abyss of a return to war and re-engage," Akashi said.

Japan is one of the co-chairs to the peace process - along with

Norway, the US and the European Union.

Japan was 'deeply concerned and dismayed' over Sri Lanka and wanted both the government and LTTE to pull back for the sake of the people, Akashi said. While praising Norway for its achievement thus far, Akashi said Tokyo also wanted India to play a larger role to resurrect the peace process.

Akashi denied that the international donors conference Tokyo hosted in 2003 was meant to be a 'peace trap' for the Tamil Tigers. "Some kind of entrapment was far from our objective," he said.

Asked by IANS what went wrong with the 2002 ceasefire that had showed so much promise, Akashi - speaking softly and choosing his words carefully - blamed it on the 'deeply ingrained mutual distrust' between the two sides for their inability to come to terms with one another.

Akashi also urged the LTTE to

reverse its decision asking three of the five member countries of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), the Nordic body overseeing the truce, to quit the island. The LTTE's complaint is that Denmark, Sweden and Finland can no more play a neutral role since they are part of the EU that has outlawed the Tigers.

But Japan, he went on, had no intention of playing any supervisory role vis-a-vis the ceasefire without "a UN umbrella."

As for the UN itself assuming a possible role in the Sri Lankan conflict, Akashi said that would depend on Colombo and the LTTE. Until then, such a question would be 'entirely hypothetical'.

Sounding hopeful despite the unending bloodshed, Akashi outlined a three-step approach to achieve peace in Sri Lanka.

Firstly, the 2002 ceasefire agreement would have to be strengthened 'with a more credible

SLMM'. And for that, 'it will be very short sighted to weaken the (existing) SLMM'.

Secondly, a 'comprehensive roadmap' would have to be thought of to evolve a final solution 'within a united or undivided Sri Lanka', with necessary amendments to the country's constitution, to usher in a new form of governance.

Thirdly, there will have to be 'certain self rule' in the LTTE controlled areas while taking steps 'towards the final solution'.

The first, he insisted, would have occur immediately.

Echoing the growing international frustration, Akashi said: "Lately, we have been very unhappy with the most tragic acts of terrorism... Not all incidents can be attributed to the LTTE. But LTTE has committed more violations of the ceasefire than the government side."

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## Rajapakse ...

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should be covered by the proposed CMP. "It is expected to include a joint approach towards resolving the ethnic issue, dealing with the international community and tackling economic issues," it said

President Rajapaksa led the government side during the three rounds of talks held at "Temple Trees" on July 14, 19 and 20. The President made clear during the talks that the support and backing from the JVP, as a partner in the Government, "would go a long way in achieving the ideals his government stood for."

"Among the key areas [discussed] were the joint approach to the ongoing ethnic conflict, related role by the international community including foreign lobbies, economic issues and how to deal with terrorism," the paper's political column further said.

Mr. Amarasinghe's attack on the Norwegian peace process is in keeping with the pact the JVP signed with Mr. Rajapakse ahead of the Presidential elections last November, which he won with a wholly Sinhala vote boosted by the JVP's grassroots campaigning.

The JVP leader said his party was presently engaged in a dialogue with the President to "reinvigorate and operationalise the Mahinda Chintanaya", referring to the title of Rajapakse's election manifesto ("Mahinda's thoughts").

The JVP leader also said that the international community, including the Co-Chairs of the Tokyo donors' conference - EU, United States Norway and Japan - were lecturing to Sri Lankans about how to run their country, and abridging Sri Lanka's sovereignty in the process.

They were also equating the

sovereign state of Sri Lanka with a terrorist group like the LTTE.

These were not acceptable positions, Amarasinghe said, singling out Japanese Special Envoy Yasushi Akashi, who visited the island last week for criticism.

The Sri Lankan armed forces were fully capable of defeating the LTTE, the JVP leader said.

Amid persistent fears of a resurgence in Sri Lanka's protracted conflict, the international community, especially India, has been pushing for a bipartisan approach to the conflict between the SLFP and the main opposition United National Party (UNP).

Two weeks ago, India's Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran flew to Colombo and met with both Mr. Rajapakse and UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe.

However an initial agreement Mr. Saran thrashed out between the two leaders collapsed within days when President Rajapakse persuaded another UNP lawmaker, the fourth this year, to cross over.

Analysts say the President killed two birds with one stone, continuing to weaken the UNP while escaping the Indian obligation when the outraged opposition unilaterally pulled out of the deal.

JVP leader Amerasinghe had made clear his party wanted to ensure that there was a clear cut programme of action agreed upon. Hence the move to agree on a Common Minimum Programme.

Mr. Amerasinghe wants to go public with such a CMP soon after an accord is reached.

The next round of talks to reach finality on the CMP is to be held at Janadipathi Mandiraya. President Rajapaksa moved in there last Saturday. This was after a Buddhist pirth ceremony on Friday night followed by a dana.

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