

From New Delhi by Ramtanu Maitra

Jayewardene's dilemma

India holds the key to his reconciliation with the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka.

After several weeks of intense diplomatic activity between Sri Lanka and India, Sri Lankan President Junius Jayewardene has been left with little room to maneuver. Not only has Jayewardene's bid to gain fame and political longevity as a key Anglo-American card in the region against India flopped miserably, but ironically his very ability to stay in power now rests with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Mrs. Gandhi's personal envoy, senior Indian diplomat G. Parthasarathy, spent the last week of August in Sri Lanka meeting with all relevant Sri Lankan political leaders. He met with Jayewardene twice behind closed doors and with the leader of the opposition Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), S. Amirthalingam, as well as with right-wing Sinhalese leaders.

The Indian diplomat's sensitive mission is to seek a common ground on which the Tamil oppositionists and the Jayewardene government can start negotiations toward freer and more meaningful participation by the Tamil minority in the Sinhalese-dominated political process. It is the Jayewardene government's insistence on the retention of the present unitary as opposed to federal political system, on the one hand, and the refusal of TULF leaders to give up the option of a separate state on the other, that has made Parthasarathy's job difficult. India can play a conciliating role since the ethnic Tamil group are descendents of Indian immigrants who retain ties to their cousins in India.

Parthasarathy's trip, considered by many a major concession on Jaye-

wardene's part, followed a hastily arranged visit to India by Hector Jayewardene, the Sri Lankan president's brother and personal envoy, who had several long discussions with the Indian prime minister. The message the president's brother carried back home was simple: shouting about separatism aside, a political reconciliation with the Tamil minority is the only adequate safeguard for Sri Lanka's unity.

Jayewardene has since been caught in two serious cases of duplicity, creating serious credibility problems. First, and particularly damaging, is the report that he sought military assistance from U.S. and British forces to prevent an alleged Indian invasion of Sri Lanka. After denying the report for weeks, Jayewardene meekly admitted to the *Indian Press*, a New Delhi daily, that he had indeed sought such assistance from the United States, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Second, it has been revealed that the Sinhalese military went on a communalist rampage killing Tamilians in Colombo while the president was in the presidential palace protected by tanks. It has been further revealed that while Gamini Dissanayake, Jayewardene's minister for Lands and Mahaweli Development, was seen encouraging the Sinhalese army to burn down Tamilian and Indian property, Minister of Industries Cyril Mathew was urging the army to rout the Tamilians at Trincomalee, a Tamil majority port city, to make room for the Sinhalese population to move in. Ma-

thew is well known as one of the strongest proponents of handing over Trincomalee to the United States as a fueling base for the Diego Garcia naval installation. Bringing in such facilities at this time would accomplish nothing other than the reversal of the past two year's hard-fought improvements in U.S.-India relations.

In spite of such scandalous exposures, a cunning Jayewardene had to use his symbiotic relationship with the Sinhala right wing to "play politics." In an interview with the London *Times* conducted while Parthasarathy was in Colombo, Jayewardene said that India has no business interfering in Sri Lanka's affairs and that he would be pleased if Mrs. Gandhi keeps her hands off the island-state. Although charges of Soviet and East German involvement in the rioting made by Jayewardene as a pretext to seek military help from the United States and to ban three left-wing political parties have been proven to be nothing more than a charade, the Sri Lankan president continues to harp on the theme.

As Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the former prime minister stripped of her civic rights by Jayewardene, said in an interview with an Indian daily, India's conciliating role is the only hope to bring the warring groups together. Expressing little confidence in the Sri Lankan government's ability to act responsibly, Mrs. Bandaranaike pointed out that the government's chief spokesman, Douglas Liyanage, is himself a convicted criminal, having been convicted in 1961 of attempting to overthrow the government. He later used bribery to escape the jail term.

Mrs. Bandaranaike pointed out Jayewardene's dilemma: "Obviously, he wants the Indian auspices as he can not say to his Sinhala chauvinists that India should be given a role in the domestic problem of Sri Lanka."