

# Sri Lanka: Maoists, monks join hands

by Ramtanu Maitra

The historic agreement signed by Sri Lankan President Junius Richard Jayewardene and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on July 29, to bring an end to the four-year-old ethnic conflict between Sri Lankan Tamils and the majority Sinhala community, is now being sabotaged by a coalition of saffron-clad Buddhist fundamentalists and the Moscow-trained leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—People's Liberation Front.

A series of incidents over the past weeks, starting with riots which followed the signing of the agreement, trace the pattern of this menacing coalition. On July 31, a member of parliament, Jinadasa Wedasinghe, was shot to death in Ratnapura, in southern Sri Lanka, by assailants suspected to be JVP members. A number of JVP members have since been picked up by the police for subversive activities.

On Aug. 18, a hand grenade was thrown into the parliament building, while parliament was in session. President Jayewardene fortunately escaped the assassination attempt, but one member of the ruling United National Party (UNP) died. Sri Lankan Minister of National Security Lalith Athulathmudali, a pivotal figure in the agreement with India, and Prime Minister R. Premadasa were injured.

The spate of violence that has followed the signing of the agreement was not totally unexpected. In 1983, the Sri Lanka government had alleged that the JVP was involved in the Colombo riots which precipitated the next four years of internecine warfare. During this period, the Tamils organized themselves into a fighting army, while the Sinhala fanatics formed a coalition with the Buddhist monks and the JVP.

On May 10, 1987 President Jayewardene accused the JVP of plotting to assassinate the President and other Sri Lankan leaders. What is the JVP?

Sixteen years ago, in 1971, the group first shot into the limelight when this 10,000-strong underground Maoist group carried out a simultaneous assault on 92 police stations in different parts of the country, capturing 35 of them, and holding them for a short while. Thirty-seven policemen and 26 military personnel were killed. Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, then prime minister of Sri Lanka, sought India's help to put down the insurrection.

The JVP is led by one Rohana Wijeweera, a graduate of Moscow's Lumumba University. According to A.C. Alles, a judge in the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka, in his book *Insurgency 1971*, Wijeweera started out as a sympathizer of

Sri Lanka's pro-Beijing Communist Party, but later broke away. He then found support from South Yemen and Europe. To recruit followers, Wijeweera developed a five-lecture series devoted to attacking India as "expansionist" and the Tamils for "stealing the jobs of the sons of the soil."

The JVP was banned following the 1983 Colombo riot. Wijeweera and his cohort Vasudeva Nanayakkra of the Nava Sama Samaj Party (NSSP), went underground and began organizing in the southern part of Sri Lanka among the Buddhists and tea-garden laborers. In organizing the tea-garden laborers, who are Tamils of Indian origin, Wijeweera was helped by one faction among the Tamil militants, the Peoples Liberation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). PLOTE is led by Uma Maheswaran, a Marxist with ties to the Soviet Union and the Indian Communist parties.

By late in 1986 the JVP had clearly become a significant force. At the inauguration of the Buddhist fundamentalist-led Jatika Peramuna (National Front) on Aug. 9, 1986, at the Asgiriya temple in Kandy, a high-ranking leader of the JVP was reportedly present. JVP leader Palipam Chandananda Thero used the occasion to denounce the government for negotiating with the Tamils, who, according to Thero, are "terrorists" involved in killing Buddhist monks. Sri Lankan Freedom Party boss and former prime minister, Mrs. Bandaranaike, also attended the launching of the National Front.

Since then, the Buddhist fundamentalists have adopted an anti-India campaign that is an echo of the JVP line. Thero has warned on many occasions that Sri Lanka's problems cannot be solved so as to please India. He has also called for President Jayewardene's resignation and abandonment of talks with the Tamils.

## Destabilization threat

Following the signing of the agreement in July, Thero delivered this ultimatum: "By agreeing to this . . . the Sri Lankan government has betrayed the Sinhalese people. We will oppose this package. It is wrong. Of course our opposition will be peaceful. But if the government refuses to change its mind, it could become violent. At that point even the Buddhist clergy will not be able to restrain the Sinhalese people."

This threat has not been taken lightly by the Sri Lankan government, which has reason to believe that the JVP members have put on the saffron robe of the Buddhist monks and are operating under the shelter of the temple. On Aug. 24 the government issued orders that all Buddhist monks will have to carry identification cards. The Sri Lankan Cultural Affairs Ministry is now in the process of compiling lists of the monks who will be given such cards.

Mrs. Bandaranaike's opportunism is another powerful factor in this destabilization threat. Eager to seize political advantage in the coming 1989 elections, she has positioned herself as a champion of the Sinhala cause, and stooped to cooperate with the same JVP which in 1971 tried to destroy her.