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Latest Sri Lanka Tragedy Stuns a World Tom by Violence; Hindu Council Meets with President Jayewardene

On May 3rd and 4th CNN television broadcast to millions of Americans the gnarled wreckage of an airline literally torn in half while passengers were embarking at the Colombo airport. Apparently, the giant blast was caused by a time bomb. Reporters surmised that the device may have been set to explode in the air and had prematurely detonated. Twenty-one international travelers, names unknown as of press time, were killed, and another 40 were hospitalized, some with critical injuries.

In a world sickened by terrorism and growing violence, the images of bodies strewn on the tarmac among the wreckage were powerful testimony of an international problem that continues to elude the most determined diplomatic and political solutions. The media gathered several US-based Tamils before the cameras to explain as best they could the events which caused escalated terrorism. Mr. S. Arun reiterated for those who may not have heard it until now that Hindu Tamils have suffered in Sri Lanka for decades, trying for some form of equality and self-determination in the mostly Buddhist nation.

One new twist appeared this time, not seen on US TV previously. A Tamil priest in black robes and white collar spoke of the "Tamil Christian and Hindu community's" unfair treatment in the country. That he would mention the tiny fraction of Tamils who are Christians first, even before the 85% Hindus, suggested that efforts were being made to solicit the support of Americans by hinting that their Christian brothers and sisters are suffering.

Colombo Conclave: One day before the explosion Hinduism Today received documents of an important meeting held in Colombo on April 7th. On that day the

Council of Hindu Organizations met with President J.R. Jayewardene, the Minister of National Security and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Among the 12 Hindu leaders present representing the Council were the following: Mr. Yogendra Duraiswami (Visva Hindu Parishad); Mr. A. Doraiswamy Pillai; Mr. K. Chitravel (YMHA); Mr. M. Sivanesarajah (YMHA); Ms. N. Kasipillai (Ramakrishna Mission); Ms. C. Kandiah (Hindu Women's Society) and others.

The Council had prepared the important agenda during its Annual General Meeting, held on April 5th at the Ramakrishna Mission in Colombo. They discussed with the President such urgent matters as 1.) sacrilege and wanton damage to Hindu temples and priestly staff by an uncontrolled sector of the armed forces which has not been even disciplined for these crimes, 2.) Trincomalee Hindus being denied the right to cremate their dead, being compelled instead to bury the dead in a Catholic cemetery, 3.) hardships to innocent families caused by extended (sometimes months long) detention of breadwinners by Security Forces; and 4.) air attacks and naval bombardment of Jaffna peninsula which caused widespread civilian casualties and destruction of property.

When the Hindu leaders called upon the government to accept as its first duty "the protection of its own citizens," the President promised the Council members that the issues would be handled without delay and problems, where found, would be redressed. Yogendra Duraiswamy, Council President, noted that "These problems stem from the failure to arrive at a political settlement of the ethnic problem...we told the President that it was the responsibility of the government to take the initiative, bring about a cease-fire and place before the public the government's proposals so that this could form the basis of negotiations for a settlement."

The deadly explosion at the airport less than a month later may not have halted the genuine struggle for a peaceful settlement in this lush and almost paradisaical island, but they certainly have shown the horrible consequences when good men fail to find such a solution.