

SPECIAL REPORT

TAMIL MILITANTS

Suspended Animation

THE fluctuating graph of efforts to end Sri Lanka's ethnic strife took an upswing after the Centre's offensive launched along with a crackdown on Tamil militants in Tamil Nadu. But prospects of a settlement are dim and the Indian involvement could boomerang on New Delhi. Senior Correspondent S.H. VENKATRAMANI and Senior Editor PRABHU CHAWLA report:

THE Rajiv Gandhi Government has literally caught a tiger by the tail. Having dealt itself a hand in Sri Lanka's ethnic strife by periodically raising the stakes for both the key players—the latest example being last fortnight's SAARC summit in Bangalore—New Delhi now finds itself inextricably trapped in an increasingly dangerous and debilitating game. However honourable the intentions, South Block is finding that its desperate attempts to broker a settlement of the Tamil tangle are like performing a trapeze act over a mine-field. Nothing illustrates this better than New Delhi's curious—and clumsy—crackdown on the Tamil militants in Tamil Nadu immediately before and after the Bangalore summit attended by Sri Lanka President J.R. Jayewardene. Though the Centre has denied a hand in

the crackdown, the militants and most observers are convinced that state Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran would not have given the go-ahead without New Delhi's tacit approval.

The pre-summit crackdown was, in diplomatic terms, a viable gambit since public opinion in Tamil Nadu had taken a sharp turn against the militants and there was little negative fall-out from the disarming of key militant groups.

Then, last fortnight, the Tamil Nadu police raided—for the second time—the militant groups, most importantly the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and snapped their vital links with their counterparts in northern and eastern Sri Lanka by confiscating their communications equipment. Said LTTE spokesman A.S. Balasingham: "We lost all our eight wireless transmit-

ters and receivers in the coastal areas of the state like Rameswaram, Mandapam, Vedaranyam, and Madras." Three transmitters operated by the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and one by the Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) were also seized.

The sudden severance of communication links was a major blow to the militant leaders' ability to get constant information about the Sri Lankan Army and pass on instructions to their cadres on the island. Said Velupillai Pirabhakaran, LTTE leader and military commander, who undertook a highly-publicised 'fast unto death' in protest: "With this seizure of our communications-machinery, the most vital link in our armed liberation struggle was broken. We got the impression that all these

Cartoon by AJIT NINAN

