

## Extradition bid a ploy to deflect charges: Tamil

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A Tamil refugee who has accused the Sri Lankan high commissioner to Canada of torture says a threat to seek his extradition to his homeland is a "despicable and desperate attempt" to discredit him.

The diplomatic war of words between local Tamils and the Sri Lankan High Commission flared Tuesday after a government minister in Colombo said the country is considering whether to attempt to have Umapathisivan Pararajasegaran stand trial in Colombo.

National Security Minister Lalth Athulathmudali told a press conference his government is reviewing its evidence against Pararajasegaran, who came to Ottawa from his Paris, France home last weekend, in connection with the attempted murder in 1978 of a former Tamil member of parliament of the ruling United National party.

Sri Lanka may seek extradition now because it did not know of the Tamil's whereabouts until he recently made the allegations about the past military activities of High Commissioner Tissa Weeratunga.

However, despite the Sri Lankan minister's threat, an External Affairs spokesman confirmed Canada does not have an extradition treaty with the country and therefore has no obligation to cooperate with a request.

In a sworn affidavit to Amnesty International, Pararajasegaran says Weeratunga — in 1979 the army commander in the northern district of Jaffna while a state of emergency was in force to counter violence and unrest among the Tamil minority — personally su-

pervised sessions in which he was tortured.

In an interview Tuesday with *The Citizen*, Pararajasegaran said he was about 300 kilometres away from Colombo working on a refugee farm when the MP was shot.

"I had absolutely nothing to do with it," he said through a translator.

Pararajasegaran said he was arrested the day after the incident, but released without charges.

Although he says he is innocent, Pararajasegaran says he fears going back to Sri Lanka to face the charges and plans to return to his Paris home after his two-week stay in Canada.

Another Sri Lankan minister, acting Foreign Affairs Minister Tyrone Fernando, hinted at reprisals against Canadian diplomats if the government decides to inquire into Weeratunga's record.

External spokesman Natalie Kirschberg said the department has asked Canada's high commission in Colombo to clarify the Sri Lankan government's position.

Meanwhile in his first public comment on the growing controversy, External Affairs Minister Joe Clark said the government takes the allegations against Weeratunga seriously, but said there are not enough "true facts" to justify Canadian action against him at this stage.

He said cautious inquiries "through diplomatic practice and courtesy" are being made by Canadian officials into allegations from several sources.

Weeratunga has denied all the allegations, blaming them on Tamil separatists now living in Canada who want to poison diplomatic relations and "distort and disrupt the bond of friendship" between the two countries.