

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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EXTRA 109/93

Fear of Execution

30 December 1993

SRI LANKA

Gopalaswamy Mahendrarajah and 120 others

According to a Sri Lanka government-owned newspaper, former deputy leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Gopalaswamy Mahendrarajah, and 120 of his followers, reportedly being held by the LTTE in Jaffna, are due to be executed by the LTTE on 16 January 1994. Amnesty International has not been able to confirm this report from other sources, but believes it to be credible.

Gopalaswamy Mahendrarajah, who is commonly known as "Mahattaya", was reported to have been arrested in Jaffna by the LTTE in August, together with his followers. He had apparently had policy differences with the leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran, and was reportedly accused by the LTTE of having informed the Indian government about an arms shipment, which the Indian navy intercepted on 16 January 1993. The ship was blown up, apparently by another LTTE leader, Kittu, who was on board.

An aide to Gopalaswamy Mahendrarajah was recently reported as having been killed by LTTE cadres in November on the orders of LTTE leader Prabhakaran. The aide had apparently criticized him for imprisoning Mahendrarajah.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The LTTE are fighting the Government of Sri Lanka to establish a separate Tamil state in the northeast of the island which they call Eelam. They control most of the northern Jaffna peninsula.

The LTTE have committed numerous gross abuses of human rights in past years, including the execution of alleged informers, the deliberate killing of Muslim and Sinhalese civilians and torture of prisoners. During 1993, however, the LTTE appeared to have altered its tactics in accordance with certain humanitarian norms and there were no reports of large-scale attacks by the LTTE on civilian targets.

In November 1993 LTTE spokesperson Anton Balasingham was reported as having admitted that the LTTE takes "serious action" against informers, but added that the organization is now trying to "improve and reform" itself.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has access to only 32 prisoners of war held by the LTTE. These are policemen and one soldier who were taken prisoner by the LTTE in 1990. The ICRC has not had access to any of the numerous Tamil political prisoners held by the LTTE.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases. It considers the death penalty to be the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. It is appealing to the LTTE not to carry out these executions, and to ensure that the International Committee of the Red Cross have regular access to these prisoners.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express and airmail letters either in Tamil or English or in your own language:

- expressing concern at the reports that Gopalaswamy Mahendrarajah and 120 of his followers are due to be executed on 16 January 1994;
- urging that these executions are not carried out;
- urging that the ICRC be granted immediate and regular access to Gopalaswamy Mahendrarajah, his followers, and any other political prisoners held by the LTTE.

APPEALS TO

1) Lawrence Thilaker
Tamil Coordinating Committee
341 Rue des Pyrenees
75020 Paris, France

Telegrams: Mr Thilaker, TCC, 341 Rue des Pyrenees, Paris, France

Faxes: + 33 1 43 58 11 91

Salutation: Dear Mr Thilaker

2) LTTE International Secretariat
United Tamil Organization
211 Katherine Road
London E8 1BU
United Kingdom

Telegrams: LTTE, UTO, 211 Katherine Road, London, UK

Faxes: + 44 81 470 8593

Salutation: Dear Sir or Madam

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: LTTE offices in your own countries, if any.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.