

Sri Lanka checks on 'poison tea'

SRI LANKA has set up a special unit to test export samples after reports that Tamil guerrillas poisoned tea shipments.

The government denied the reports but said precautions were being taken.

Plantation industries secretary Mr H D T Bodhidasa said that diplomats from tea-importing countries would be briefed this week about the situation.

Tea prices fell by an average 5p per kilo at the weekly auction yesterday as buyers from Western countries reacted cautiously to the warnings.

In Sydney, a leading Australian tea company said it had suspended imports from

Standard Foreign News Desk

Sri Lanka because of reports in India's Calcutta Telegraph newspaper last week that rebels had put arsenic in tea bound for the U.S.

Minority

A U.S. embassy official said today that the embassy was told last week by the Tamil Eelam Army guerrilla group that arsenic had been mixed in some tea shipments. The official said the U.S. Food and Drugs Administration was testing all imported Sri Lankan tea.

The guerrilla group is one of several fighting for a sep-

arate state for the minority Tamil community in the north and east of Sri Lanka.

The Australian tea merchants Bushells, who import about half of Australia's tea, said their suspension would continue until they were absolutely sure there was nothing wrong with Sri Lankan tea.

"Although the Sri Lankan government has denied the claims, we are taking them very seriously," said Mr Roger Etty, Bushells' director of commodities.

Mr Etty said that the company's imports from Sri Lanka had dropped in recent years but declined to say what the present level was.

In the 12 months to June 1985, Australia imported 8,400,000 lb of tea from Sri Lanka.

Tea check after threat of arsenic

By a Staff Reporter

The Sri Lankan Government and tea producers have started checking export consignments after Tamil guerrillas warned the British and American embassies in Colombo that they planned to contaminate them with arsenic powder.

The Tamils are fighting for autonomy in the eastern and northern province.

A spokesman for the Tea Council in London said yesterday that the threats were being taken seriously but the trade was satisfied that comprehensive checks were being instituted. Stocks of tea take 15 weeks to arrive from the island, the spokesman said.

The Foreign Office said it was in touch with the authorities in Colombo, who had given an assurance that they were taking all necessary steps. Though there had been threats on previous occasions, there had been no known contamination, Whitehall officials said.

Britain is Sri Lanka's third biggest customer for tea, taking about 15 million kilos in 1984.

'POISON' SCARE HALTS CEYLON TEA IMPORTS

By Our Diplomatic
Correspondent

British firms have suspended imports of tea from Sri Lanka following reports that Tamil separatists have poisoned consignments with arsenic or cyanide.

But the Department of Trade and Industry and tea industry emphasised that there was no danger from packed teas now on sale in Britain, because there was a time-lag of up to six months between the tea being shipped and being packed for sale.

There has been no confirmation from Tamil sources and a Sri Lankan tea board official said that tests had shown no evidence of poisoning. But a Brooke Bond spokesman said yesterday: "We are taking it seriously."

Arsenic 'mixed in tea supplies'

OFFICIALS in Sri Lanka were yesterday investigating reports that guerrillas had poisoned tea exports to Britain and America.

Warnings were sent to British and US embassies that guerrillas from the Tamil minority had mixed arsenic in supplies.

British Tea Council executive director Ilted Lewis said last night: "Even if the threat had been carried out, Britons have nothing to fear."

He added that it took 15 weeks for imports to reach this country and anything unusual would be found during loading.