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## More Tamil vessels may be headed for Canada

By Marten Youssef

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*As the MV Sun Sea approaches the B.C. coast, two more ships of potential asylum seekers are preparing to set sail, terrorism expert says*

Two shiploads of potential asylum seekers are waiting to see how Canada deals with a vessel expected to arrive in B.C. next week with 200 Tamils on board before deciding if they, too, will head for Canada's shores, a top terrorism expert says.

"There are two other vessels that are planning to conduct a similar voyage to Canada," said Rohan Gunaratna, who heads a research centre in Singapore. Dr. Gunaratna, whose area of expertise is Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, declined to disclose his sources but was one of the first people to warn Canada about the MV Sun Sea - which reports say is in the eastern Pacific Ocean bound for British Columbia - when the ship was initially travelling to Australia.

In a telephone interview, Dr. Gunaratna said the MV Sun Sea will likely arrive in B.C. some time next week, less than a year after the migrant ship Ocean Lady arrived off Canada's west coast with 76 Tamil asylum seekers on board.

"[Because of] Canada's response to Ocean Lady last year, the Tamil Tigers decided to dispatch Sun Sea to Canada, and depending on Canadian response to this vessel, the two other ships will arrive," Dr. Gunaratna said. He added that the two ships are in South Asian waters collecting passengers. "They are in a phase of gathering money from those who will travel," Dr. Gunaratna said.

Sri Lanka's high commissioner in Ottawa said she is not aware of any vessels intending to make such a journey. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade refused to comment, citing operational security.

The MV Sun Sea is reported to be carrying high-ranking members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a banned terrorist organization in Canada, although Canadian officials have not speculated on who may be on board.

The ship was sighted off the coast of Guatemala in July and the United States Coast Guard confirmed on July 23 that it was travelling under the Thai flag and heading toward British Columbia.

Although Defence Minister Peter MacKay confirmed last week that Canada has been tracking the ship for some time, there is little that authorities can do to stop it from entering Canadian territorial waters. The RCMP can not detain or board a vessel outside Canadian territorial waters. The navy, which has such powers, can do so only in matters of national security. Public Safety Minister Vic Toews confirmed last week that Canadian authorities have not boarded the MV Sun Sea.

Dr. Gunaratna said Canada's navy should stop the MV Sun Sea, and any ships that follow it, in international waters on the grounds that they may be involved in human smuggling. "What

is the point of having a Canadian military? The Canadian military is designed to thwart threats to Canada," Dr. Gunaratna said.

Canadian embassies abroad, particularly in South Asia, include representatives from the RCMP and the intelligence community, who work with local authorities to stop such vessels before they depart.

Although the Sri Lankan government has repeatedly warned that the MV Sun Sea is engaged in human smuggling, human rights groups argue that it is making a legitimate humanitarian voyage in the aftermath of the civil war in Sri Lanka, which the LTTE lost.

"It's a deadly journey," said David Poopalapillai, a spokesman for the Canadian Tamil Congress.

"We understand why they are coming at the same time we understand there are human smugglers that are making a fortune out of people's misery," Mr. Poopalapillai said. "That should be stopped too."