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Pirapaharan, Chapter 30

by T. Sabaratnam

(Volume 2)

Jaffna Police Station Attack

The Kokkilai attack of 13 February 1985, which Jayewardene acknowledged had changed the character of the Tamil armed struggle and had been timed to coincide with the Rajiv - Gandhi - Athulathmudali meeting, was not a total success. It failed to achieve the target Pirapaharan had set: the destruction of the Kokkilai Camp. He was determined that the next attack should not fail. He drew up the plan for that attack and trained his men.

The leader he chose was Kittu, who had been promoted as the Jaffna commander following the death of Pandithar. The target was the Jaffna Police Station, the police headquarters of the Jaffna district. And as usual, Pirapaharan fixed the date for the attack to coincide with a major event that attracted global attention: April 10, the day British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher visited Sri Lanka.

Pirapaharan decided to demonstrate to the world on that day that the Tamil armed struggle had graduated to the third stage - direct confrontation with the army and the police. The struggle, that had started off as hit-and-run guerrilla war in the early 'seventies and upgraded to sustained guerrilla warfare on 4 August 1984, was raised to direct confrontation with the state's forces on 13 February 1985.

Unaware of Pirapaharan's plan, Lalith Athulathmudali was engaged that very day in taking forward Jayewardene's scheme of trapping Rajiv Gandhi. Jayewardene, a skillful schemer and keen student of military matters, was clear from the start about the conflict between the Indian national interest and the interests of the Tamil Eelam movement. India's national interest required the subservience of Sri Lanka to its foreign policy needs. India wanted to use Sri Lankan Tamils as a pressure group to make the Sinhalese-controlled Sri Lankan state fall in line with its foreign policy. The desire of the Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups to carve out a separate state for the Tamils clashed with the Indian national interest.

Lalith Athulathmudali's brief was to get Rajiv Gandhi to weaken the Tamil armed struggle by getting his commitment on the following:

- An assurance that India would not invade Sri Lanka.
- A fresh start of the negotiation process.
- Discontinuance of Indian assistance to Tamil groups.
- To keep Parthasarathi out of the negotiation process.
- An assurance that India would not give in to pressure from the Tamil lobby in Tamil Nadu.
- Establishment of a joint Indian-Sri Lanka naval patrol of the Palk Straits.

During his 2-hour meeting with Rajiv Gandhi, of which one hour was without aides, Athulathmudali argued his case convincingly and succeeded in winning most of Sri Lanka's requests. "Athulathmudali reported to J R (Jayewardene) that the talks he had with Rajiv Gandhi was both friendly and very fruitful," reports Jayewardene's biographers K M de Silva and Howard Wriggins in their work *J R Jayewardene of Sri Lanka - A political Biography Volume Two: From 1956 to His Retirement in 1989* (page 607).

Rajiv Gandhi opened the discussion with the statement that he was deeply interested in establishing good and friendly relations with all South Asian neighbors, including Pakistan. He said he was very anxious that Jayewardene visit New Delhi as soon as it was convenient for him.

Rajiv's Assurance

Lalith Athulathmudali, a skillful debater, then conveyed Jayewardene's greetings and added that the elderly President's wish that Rajiv would emerge a successful world leader had begun to materialize. Rajiv's massive victory at the December parliamentary election proved it. He then thanked Rajiv Gandhi for heeding the advice of President Jayewardene, a friend of the Nehru family. He told him the assertive approach India had followed till then had generated an anti-India feeling among the Sinhala people and the fear of Indian invasion had hardened that feeling.

Rajiv Gandhi fell into the trap. He gave Athulathmudali the assurance that India would never invade Sri Lanka. India thus lost the whip it had in dealing with Jayewardene.

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Lalith Athulathmudali then switched onto the second group of objectives - fresh negotiations and keeping Parthasarathi out. Rajiv Gandhi provided the opening for that discussion by pointing to India's disappointment about the discontinuance of the All Party Conference. Athulathmudali told him that the government found it difficult to carry the Sinhala people with it. He said the SLFP and its leader Sirimavo Bandaranaike were calling Annexure C a 'sell-out.' He said Parthasarathi had forced that formula on President Jayewardene. A fresh start had to be made and a solution acceptable to the Sinhala people had to be worked out. He also said the Sinhala people felt Parthasarathi was emotionally involved with the TULF. He suggested that Parthasarathi be kept out of the negotiation process.

Rajiv Gandhi agreed for a fresh start and assured Athulathmudali he would be neutral and objective. He told him his new Foreign Secretary, Romesh Bhandari, would handle the negotiations. Rajiv had already rejected the advice and approach advocated by Parthasarathi, who headed the Political Affairs Committee. Parthasarathi did not trust Jayewardene and had cautioned Rajiv about the deviousness of the 'old fox'. Rajiv differed in his assessment of Jayewardene. He called him an elderly statesman and a good Buddhist.

Rajiv Gandhi told Athulathmudali that he would be helpful to Sri Lanka, but the government should give the Tamils regional autonomy and take action to curb army excesses, in particular the killing of civilians should cease. According to K M de Silva and Howard Wriggins, Rajiv Gandhi and Lalith Athulathmudali discussed in detail the possible political solution to the Tamil problem. Athulathmudali told Rajiv Gandhi about his government's inability to accede to the TULF demand for regional councils. He said district councils were the furthest the government could go, but the government was prepared to devolve more powers. Rajiv Gandhi agreed with Athulathmudali that districts need not be linked to form regions and that powers concerning law and order need not be devolved.

"For one thing he (Athulathmudali) found that the latter (Rajiv Gandhi) appeared to have a much clearer understanding of the limits of political concessions on regional autonomy possible in Sri Lanka, than his mother. Rajiv Gandhi himself had commented that there was no need for districts to be linked together to form a region, thus seemingly endorsing the Sri Lankan government's own policy on devolution and also repudiating Parthasarathi's position. Both sides agreed that more power should be conceded to districts. Lalith Athulathmudali was delighted to find that Rajiv Gandhi himself believed that law and order should not, in any way, be conceded to the districts. That, he said, was the mistake India had made with regard to Punjab," *J R Jayewardene of Sri Lanka - A Political Biography, Volume Two: From 1956 to His Retirement (1989)* by K M de Silva and Howard Wriggins, page 607.

Rajiv Gandhi told the *Los Angeles Times* (reproduced by the *Sunday Island*) that he warned Sri Lanka about civilian killings. "I told Lalith Athulathmudali as long as there is a feeling in India that you are committing atrocities on civilian Tamils, not the terrorists but the non-terrorists, it is very difficult for us to help you," he said.

Army Excesses

Rajiv Gandhi also told Athulathmudali that army excesses had led to the Tamil refugee problem. He said about 50,000 Tamils had sought refuge in Tamil Nadu since the 1983 riots. He added a new wave of refugees had begun to flow following the army excesses in the eastern parts of Sri Lanka.

Rajiv Gandhi told Athulathmudali that officials had told him the first boats hit Rameswaram in the pre-dawn hours of 5 February having been in the water for nine hours. That day five families of 21 persons landed. The exodus peaked four days later (9 February) when 363 persons landed at different points on the Rameswaram- Dhanuskodi coast. An average of 300 to 400 persons had arrived the past three days (10- 12 February). Officials expect the exodus to continue and that would have a violent impact on the people of Tamil Nadu, Rajiv Gandhi warned.

Lalith Athulathmudali's third group of objectives was to stop the Indian training and arming of Tamil militant groups and the neutralization of the Tamil Nadu factor. He had in his delegation Deputy Inspector General of Police (Intelligence) Cyril Herath, who had prepared a detailed account of the militant training camps in Tamil Nadu, including the names of the Indian trainers and the type and quantity of weapons issued by India. Herath had compiled this report based on the information gathered from captured militants and Indian intelligence officers bought over by Sri Lanka. The names of Unnikrishnan, head of RAW's South Indian wing and Mohandas, Tamil Nadu's Deputy Inspector General of Police (Intelligence) have been mentioned as the suspect persons and Tamil militant sources have confirmed that information. Unnikrishnan was later arrested and jailed for passing information to America's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Athulathmudali confronted Rajiv Gandhi with that report and genteelly suggested that he might not be aware of those happenings. Rajiv Gandhi promised to look into that matter. He also undertook to study the Sri Lankan request for a joint Indo-Sri Lanka patrol of the Palk Straits.

Athulathmudali's meeting with Rajiv Gandhi brought a sudden surge of hope and optimism to the government and UNP quarters. Commentators called it 'a thaw' in Indo-Sri Lankan relations. The *Daily News* wrote an editorial on the change of heart in the Indian leaders and policy-makers.

In India, the Minister of State for External Affairs, Khurshed Alam Khan issued a statement in both the Houses of Parliament. He said a number of suggestions had been considered during the Rajiv Gandhi - Lalith Athulathmudali meeting, including the situation prevailing in Sri Lanka and its fallout in India.

The carefully worded statement said Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had told Lalith Athulathmudali that India was willing to help Sri Lanka if it so desired, but ultimately the Sri Lankan government itself would have to find a political solution to the island's ethnic problem.

Alam Khan deplored army excess, expressed concern about the flow of refugees and said Rajiv Gandhi had conveyed to Lalith Athulathmudali in the "strongest possible terms" its concern about the killing, injuring and arresting of Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan navy.

Incidents involving Tamil Nadu fishermen and the Sri Lanka navy had been taking place since Sri Lanka banned fishing in the Palk Straits in early 1984. Tamil Nadu fishermen made use of this opportunity to fish inside Sri Lankan territorial waters. They were also involved in smuggling and assisting Tamil militant groups to transport men and material between northern Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. The Sri Lankan navy arrested 17 Tamil Nadu trawlers and the 74 members of their crew in October. The crew was charged before the Anuradhapura High Court, warned and discharged, but the skippers of those trawlers were kept in remand.

In the first week of January 1985 the Sri Lankan army opened fire and killed two Indian fishermen. The Indian Foreign Office summoned the Sri Lankan High Commissioner in Delhi and lodged a strong protest for firing at Indian fishermen within Indian territorial waters. Colombo issued a statement saying that the Indian fishermen were within Sri Lankan waters. India placed the Indian Coast Guard to protect its fishermen. An Indian Coast Guard vessel arrested a Sri Lankan naval patrol boat saying it was inside Indian territorial waters, seized the boat and remanded the naval officers. India also stepped up its naval presence in the Palks Strait.

Sri Lanka demanded the immediate return of the naval patrol boat and the release of the naval officers. India asked for the release of the 17 skippers and their trawlers in return for the navy patrol boat and its officers. This swap was agreed upon.

Jayewardene decided to make use of this conflict to ask for a joint Indo-Sri Lanka naval patrol to prevent future incidents and to foil the transport of militants and materials to and from Tamil Nadu. Rajiv Gandhi, who agreed to study the proposal, later rejected it. He did so after MGR met him in Delhi and conveyed his opposition.

Rajiv Gandhi's rejection of the joint naval patrol proposal did not dampen the feeling of elation in Colombo. UNP's policy planners seized on Rajiv Gandhi's unguarded remarks - 'no need to link district councils' and 'law and order should not, in any way, be conceded to the districts' - to return to their 'district councils and no more' position.

The UNP launched a propaganda blitz in support of that position. The propaganda distinguished between the New Delhi and Chennai perceptions of the Sri Lankan Tamil issue. The propagandists tried to show that New Delhi perception and interests favoured Sri Lanka. Conceding too much autonomy to the northeast would be damaging not only to Sri Lanka, but also to India, they argued.

Premadasa went further. He said separatists were more than separatists. They were Marxists and therefore they should be defeated. He made stirring speeches, often to the martial sound of trumpets in the background. Cyril Mathew, who had been dismissed from the cabinet, advocated war. He said in parliament and outside that the Tamil militants should be destroyed.

Jayewardene reflected this growing Sinhala extremism in his 20 February policy statement in Parliament. His announcement about the changed character of the Tamil armed struggle and his forecast about the launch of 'a final decisive battle' by them generated in the country intense anti-Tamil feeling. Tamils lived in fear. Lalith Athulathmudali, Gamini Dissanayake and other UNP leaders stirred Sinhala anger against the Tamils.

Lalith Athulathmudali told a public meeting on 24 February that Tamil militants were getting ready to launch the final battle in March or April. "The country is ready for the attack, and we will succeed in defeating them," he said.

The traditional Contest

The SLFP-led opposition added to the Sinhala fury. SLFP leader Sirimavo Bandaranaike castigated the government for failure to achieve a political settlement and failure to defeat terrorism. "Can you hold a meeting or any function anywhere in the north?" Sirimavo Bandaranaike asked. She charged that the government was keeping the country on the 'boil' to cover all its failures.

The UNP countered the opposition's nationwide campaign by holding "Help the Government to Combat Terrorism" rallies. The old Sinhala politics of '**more Sinhala-Buddhist than thou**' was revived. The game of winning Sinhala support by showing that they are the better protectors of Sinhala interests, which was started in 1952 with the founding of the SLFP by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, was revitalized.

Jayewardene used this anti-Tamil environment to show himself, to India and the world, as the only responsible leader who was interested in working out a reasonable solution to the Tamil problem. He wrote to Rajiv Gandhi on 1 March requesting him to send an official to start the negotiation process. He said he was willing to seek a political settlement. He indicated that he was prepared to agree to the creation of provincial councils. He indicated terrorism was the main impediment to the settlement. He asked Rajiv Gandhi's help to eradicate terrorism.

The tricky letter

The text of the letter:

My dear Rajiv, allow me to commence this letter with an extract from the speech I made, when I visited India in October 1978, on a state visit. 'I am a friend of India and its people; an admirer of its heritage, and a follower of its greatest son.'

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"I need hardly mention that it is not only as the president of Sri Lanka that I am writing to the prime minister of India, I am writing as the friend of the Nehru family, you being a third generation that I have known since I became acquainted with your grandfather, when I entertained him at my home in Sri Lanka in 1939. He was one of my heroes together with other great leaders of India who led the freedom movement, cherishing truth and non-violence as their guiding principles. I still try to follow those ideals. I was his guest for a few days at his home in Allahabad when I attended the Ramgarh Sessions of the Congress in 1941. I later corresponded with him when he was in jail. I have sent copies of those letters to the Nehru Archives and I wish to present one to you whenever I have the chance to do so. I met him again when I attended the Bombay Sessions of the All India Congress Committee in which the 'Quit India' resolution was passed in 1942. Jawaharlal Nehru and your father were also present at the house of Mrs Huthee Singh whom I visited. You need not doubt that the sentiments expressed in the first paragraph of those letter are sincere and still live in my mind.

"Unfortunately, relations between our two countries have been affected recently by difficulties which we are both aware of. This has weighed heavily on my mind for some time and I hope that it will be possible to set this right soon. In this context, I am specially appreciative of the hearing which you gave my minister a few weeks ago. His report of conversations in Delhi have encouraged me to make a new effort to break the kind of deadlock we now face. In order to do this, I would very much like to meet you personally for further discussions. However, before such a meeting, I think it would be most useful if you could send one of your senior officials to meet me here. I would welcome such a visit as it will be helpful to enable me to arrive at an understanding of your present thinking. This will help to formulate a common approach to some of the problems that now exist.

"I have made several positive statements in my address at the opening of the 5th session of our parliament, on February 20. These have been distorted by the media abroad. I am therefore sending you a few copies for your reading. Your own recent statements have encouraged me to think optimistically about future prospects.

"In my speech to parliament, I referred to some of these matters. India is going through a similar situation in the North East and Punjab particularly. In many other parts of the world, terrorists are raising their ugly heads. Unlike in your country, where distance insulates the government in New Delhi from the impact of the violent events hundreds of miles away, Sri Lanka is too small in area that the effects of terrorism are dangerous manifold. In my speech, I referred to All Party Conference at pages 3-6. It was only on two matters viz, the joining of the two provinces, North and East, in one council; and the second chamber, that there was no agreement with the TULF. I had agreed to the proposals outlined in Annexure A, B and C, which visualized a Provincial [Regional] Council within a province. I had also expressed my desire to continue discussions with the TULF with regard to the decentralization of powers and functions to Provincial Councils, thus continuing the commitment to a political solution.

"I ask you very little. Let us forget the issue of training camps; the existence of Sri Lankan terrorists in South India; their plotting and planning. I ask you to help me to prevent them coming here with arms, at the same time could we not also prevent Sri Lankans from seeking refuge in your country? If we can agree on a common scheme to do this, by some form of mutual or combined surveillance, it will enable me to withdraw the armed services from combat; to suspend the operation of the Terrorist Act; and to help the North and East of Sri Lanka to return to normalcy. Surely, you can take this step forward which will help to stop this taking of life and damage to property, and the resumption of civilized life in your most friendly neighbor. We are both representatives of the people, both have received massive majorities at elections, where over half the electorates voted for us and enjoying in our parliaments a 5/6th majority. Cross-border terrorism threatens the very fabric of this democracy. It is an issue on which all major political parties in Sri Lanka agree and it is the single most important impediment to a solution of our ethnic tension. Do please understand our problem, which is now yours too, and help?"

Rajiv Gandhi's actions that followed the receipt of this letter show that he fell flatly into Jayewardene's trap.

New Foreign Policy

As indicated by Parthasarathi to Balasingham and Amirthalingam, top officials of the Indian intelligence agencies met with

the leaders of the Tamil militant groups and briefed them about Rajiv Gandhi's new policy towards Sri Lanka. The meetings took place in the first week of March (a few days after Jayewardene's letter) in Chennai and the Hindu holy city of Kasi. Girish Chandra Saxena, head of RAW, briefed the Tamil militant leaders in Chennai. M. K. Narayanan, director of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), met them in Kasi.

Balasingham has recorded the content of those meetings in *War and Peace* (Pages 67-70). He says he and Pirapaharan attended the meeting that was held at a secret location in Chennai. He says Saxena, very tall and fair with sparkling eyes, spoke commandingly. It was a monologue rather than a dialogue, Balasingham adds.

Saxena explained India's policy and strategy during Indira Gandhi's period and what Rajiv Gandhi had decided to do in the future. He said that the government of India under Indira Gandhi faced serious geo-strategic concerns when Jayewardene invited external forces and agencies inimical to India's interest into Sri Lanka to crush the Tamil struggle. The July '83 riots escalated to genocidal proportions, forcing hundreds and thousands of Tamil civilians to seek refuge in India, inflaming nationalist passions in Tamil Nadu and causing a serious destabilizing effect on India's national security. These adverse conditions necessitated Indian intervention.

Saxena told Pirapaharan and Balasingham that the central objective behind India's efforts was to contain the violence against the Tamil civilian population, restore peace, ethnic reconciliation and, most importantly, stability in the region. Tamil militant organizations were given military assistance to defend and protect Tamil civilians and to prevent state military excesses. He said Indira Gandhi never entertained ideas to undermine the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the island. She wanted Jayewardene to give up the military option and to seek a political settlement within a united Sri Lanka.

The RAW chief said India could not support Tamil aspirations for a separate state since it would have far-reaching implications in a country that had to deal with several secessionist movements.

Saxena then proceeded to deal with the policy and strategy of Rajiv Gandhi. Now I quote Balasingham:

Staring at Pirapaharan, Saxena raised his voice, 'you should understand and appreciate India's position,' he declared. The new Prime Minister wanted to build better relations, friendly relations with Sri Lanka, Saxena explained. He would adopt a fresh, new methodology of mediation to initiate a peace dialogue involving all Tamil organizations in a congenial environment of peace and normalcy. Concluding, he said the time was fast approaching for Tamil armed organizations to cease all hostile offensive operations and prepare for talks with the Sri Lanka government with Indian mediation. With that, he left and the meeting was over.

Balasingham says Pirapaharan was neither surprised nor disappointed with Rajiv Gandhi's new policy. He said Rajiv Gandhi's assessment of Jayewardene's intentions was fundamentally flawed. He was not pleased with the Indian proposal for a ceasefire because he felt it was premature. **He said Jayewardene would not concede anything to the Tamils until the military power of the state was weakened and its fighting capability was debilitated.**

Narayanan repeated the same message about Rajiv Gandhi's new policy and requested the cooperation of Tamil militant groups to India's effort to find a negotiated political solution. According to Balasingham, Narayanan told them that Rajiv Gandhi had innovative ideas on conflict resolution and new approaches on inter-state relations.

The IB chief told Pirapaharan and Balasingham that Rajiv Gandhi wanted to create in South Asia a zone of peace and tranquility, a politically stable region free from the interference of external forces of subversion. India, as South Asia's superpower, had immense responsibilities to create a new order of peace and stability in the region by building friendly relations with her neighbours.

Balasingham adds in his book,

With this vision, Mr. Narayanan explained, Delhi wanted to initiate a peace process to secure a negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict. The Government of India, he said, expected cooperation and understanding from all Tamil political forces, particularly from the armed rebel movements, in seeking a settlement that would meet the genuine political aspirations of the Tamil people.

Asked by Narayanan for his response to India's new initiative, Pirapaharan made these matters clear:

- State repression led to the emergence of Tamil armed resistance.
- The Tamil Tigers do not adulate violence, but were forced to choose it as the ultimate course of action for the preservation of the Tamil race and its identity.
- Tamil people would be grateful and appreciative if India could obtain justice and fair play through peaceful methods.
- Serious doubts exist in Tamil minds about the aims and designs of the Sinhala political leadership irrevocably enmeshed in racist ideology.

· Serious doubt exists about Rajiv Gandhi's assessment of Jayewardene's intentions.

Pirapaharan warned Narayanan that the Machiavellian mind of Jayewardene might easily mislead the inexperienced Rajiv Gandhi to the detriment of the Tamils.

Thondaman's comment

Rajiv Gandhi struck to his 'good neighbour' foreign policy, sidelined Parthasarathi and appointed the new Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari to handle Sri Lankan affairs. Rajiv Gandhi informed Jayewardene that he was pleased with his request to send an official to discuss a political solution and he had appointed Bhandari to undertake that task. Bhandari's effort was to revive the dialogue on a political solution to the ethnic problem. Bhandari offered to visit Colombo for talks with Jayewardene, his ministers and opposition politicians to acquaint himself with the ground situation.

Bhandari visited Colombo on 25 March and had talks with President Jayewardene, Lalith Athulathmudali, Gamini Dissanayake, Ronnie de Mel, Thondaman and K W Devanayagam. I met Thondaman soon after his meeting with Bhandari. He told me, "This fellow does not understand anything. When I told him that merger of the north and east is integral to any sustainable solution, he argued that merger was not essential. He argued Jayewardene's case. He said district councils with adequate powers are sufficient to provide security for the Tamils. I told Bhandari to his face that he had not understood the nature and intricacies of the problem."

Bhandari met the TULF leaders on his way back at Chennai. Amirthalingam relayed to me that Bhandari told them to place their faith in Jayewardene and asked them to prepare themselves for a fresh round of talks. He told them that India was going to involve the militant groups in the talks and they were trying to arrange a ceasefire. "We told him not to trust Jayewardene, but he was not convinced," Amirthalingam said.

On his return to New Delhi Bhandari told the media, "Fighting in Sri Lanka would soon cease and talks between the government and the Tamils will begin." He presented Rajiv Gandhi with a rosy picture. He talked of the possibility of solving the ethnic conflict.

On the basis of Bhandari's report Rajiv Gandhi told the Indian parliament on 10 April that he saw a "light at the end of the tunnel." A few days later at a farewell reception accorded by the Ceylon Workers Congress to the departing Indian High Commissioner Chhatwal, Thondaman commented, "The tunnel seems to be never ending and becoming increasingly darker."

Soon after Bhandari's Colombo trip India started helping the Sri Lankan government to curb what Jayewardene called cross-border terrorism. The Indian Coast Guard intercepted a speedboat carrying machine guns, 9mm rifles and grenades to Jaffna peninsula. Two members of the EPRLF crew in battle uniform were arrested.

Authorities and media in Colombo interpreted this, and the decline in the level of militant violence, as indicating that India had restrained the Tamil militants.

The answer Rajiv Gandhi gave to *Lanka Guardian* editor Mervyn de Silva in an interview in the last week of March was taken as providing proof of India's restraining action. Rajiv Gandhi told Mervyn de Silva, "We have urged restraints that there is a de-escalation of tension and violence in Sri Lanka."

Devastating Attack

The absence of rebel violence during March and the first week of April was due to the intense preparations Pirapaharan made for the Jaffna Police Station attack planned for 10 April to coincide with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's visit to Sri Lanka. The British government had been instrumental in arranging the hiring of former SAS commandos by Sri Lanka.

About 200 Tigers led by Kittu slipped into Jaffna town in four minibuses, several motorcycles and dozens of bicycles and took up positions in a semicircle, except near the army-guarded Jaffna Fort that lies to the north-east of the police station. A group of men walked into the Jaffna Telecommunications Exchange and asked the employees to leave the building. Another group entered the power station near the Jaffna Hospital and cut off electricity, plunging the city in darkness. The time was 9.45 p.m.

The darkness served as the signal for the attack. The Tigers pounded the police station and the office of the Deputy Inspector General of Police. They rained mortars, rockets and grenades on the police station manned by over 100 policemen. They kept up the attack for three hours. Four policemen died, two surrendered with weapons and the rest ran into the Fort. The Tigers blasted the buildings with explosives after removing the weapons from the armoury.

The Gurunagar army camp, barely a kilometer away, though shook by the explosions, did not try to send reinforcements. The soldiers took up defensive positions and stood ready to guard the army camp if attacked. Tigers stood ready to repulse the army if it sent reinforcements. They had blasted the bridges and culverts and had mined the roads. Tigers also guarded Jaffna city.

The quantity of weapons the Tigers took away were: 35 sub-machine guns, 80 Singapore-made automatic weapons, 01 rocket launcher, 175 grenades, 100 tear gas shells, 50 revolvers and huge quantity of ammunition.

In Chennai the LTTE claimed responsibility for the attack. Its statement said, "Never before have such modern weapons and equipment been used in this region. Never before in the history of the militant struggle have such explosions been

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heard."

All that Jayewardene could do was to tell Thatcher that the Tigers had timed the attack to insult her and to unleash revenge massacres, thus driving the Tamils into the fold of the militants.

The Tamil militant's answer to Rajiv Gandhi's new policy and Jayewardene's massacres were an escalation of violence and the forging of unity among themselves.

Next

Chapter 31. Unity Moves

To be posted January 7

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