

Sangam.org - Ilankai Tamil Sangam Association of Tamils of Sri Lanka in the USA

- [Active Home Page](#)
- [Previous Version Archive](#)
- [Original Version Home Page](#)

Pirapaharan, Chapter 15: The Ban, J.R.'s Gift by T. Sabaratnam ; published October 20, 2003



15: The Ban, J.R.'s Gift

Typed in Amir's Typewriter

The group that killed Bastiampillai traveled in his Peugeot 404 to Kilinochchi where they burnt the vehicle in the midst of the thick jungle. They then split into small groups and went to their Vavuniya camp, Poonthoddam. Pirapaharan welcomed them. Uma told me Pirapaharan hugged Sellakili and said: "You have done the Tamils proud."

Uma said he initiated a debate at the central committee meeting about their movement coming into the open. "We cannot continue to be a secret organization any more," he said he told the meeting. "We must come into the open. This is the correct time. The entire country is talking about us." He cited several examples from guerilla movements worldwide going into the open after drawing people's attention through some dramatic act.

Pirapaharan agreed, Uma told me. "Like the PLO and the IRA, we must also now be known," Pirapaharan said. They decided to issue a statement claiming responsibility for the murders. The details, like the drafting of the letter and its posting, were left to Uma Maheswaran, the political head.

Uma Maheswaran slipped to Colombo and telephoned his contacts in London. Contacting London by telephone was not easy in those days. Uma went to the Central Telephone Exchange in Colombo Fort, booked his call and waited three hours to get it. The LTTE supporters in London encouraged Uma. This was what other guerilla groups had done, they told him.

Uma drafted the letter on the letter pad the LTTE had printed in Chennai in 1976. It contained the LTTE insignia on the left hand corner of the sheet. The LTTE's Tamil name, 'Tamil Eela Viduthalai Kalazham,' was printed in big, bold letters on the top. Below that in smaller print came the English name: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

Armed with the draft of the letter and a LTTE letter pad, Uma met his distant relative, Urmila Devi. She was a divorcee who worked in an optical firm in Colombo. She was very active member of the Colombo branch of the Tamil Youth Forum and a front line member of the TULF Mahalir Peravai (TULF Women's Front) headed by Sivakumaran's mother, Annaledshumi Ponnuthurai. Amirthalingam's wife, Mangayarkarasi, was its secretary.

Uma told Urmila Devi he needed eight copies of the letter and warned her that it was a secret job. She undertook the job and went to the office of the Leader of the Opposition in the old parliament building. She was a frequent visitor to that office where she helped Amirthalingam and his secretary, Perinbanayagam, in typing. She thought that was the safest



A. Amirthalingam

place to type this letter. She went to the office when parliament was not in session and typed the letter without the knowledge of Amirthalingam or Perinbanayagam. Computers were not in use then. Photo copying machines were also rare. There were only two manual typewriters in Amirthalingam's office. Urmila Devi used the typewriter Amirthalingam's stenographer used. She used carbon papers to make copies. She handed the letters to Uma, who was waiting at the Secretariat bus halt.

Uma said he walked with the letters to the General Post Office (GPO) opposite President's House (then Queen's House) and posted them. He posted them to: Secretary General, Tamil United Liberation Front

General Secretary, United National Party
General Secretary, Sri Lanka Freedom Party
OIC, Police Station, Kankesanthurai
OIC, Police Station, Valvettithurai
Director, Criminal Investigation Department
Editor, *Virakesari*

He kept the original for his file.

Virakesari published the letter on 28 April as a small news story. The letter addressed "To Whom it May Concern" dated April 25, 1978, read:

The founder name of the organization - Tamil New Tigers (TNT), was changed on 5-5-76 and the new name is Liberation

Tigers of Tamil Eelam. We claim responsibility for the following deaths:

Mr Alfred Duriappah (Mayor for Jaffna, SLFP organizer, Northern region).
 Mr N Nadarajah (proprietor, petrol garage, Urumpirai and the SLFP organizer, Kopay), bombed.
 Mr A Karunanithi (CID Police, KKS), shot dead.
 Mr Shanmuganathan (CID Police, KKS), same day shot dead.
 Mr Shanmuganathan (CID Police, VVT).
 Mr Thangarajah (Secretary of the former SLFP MP Nallur Arulampalam).
 Mr C Kanagaratnam (MP for Pottuvil, former TULF and present UNP).
 Mr Bastiampillai (CID, Inspector of Police).
 Mr Perampalam (CID, Sub-Inspector of Police).
 Mr Balasingham (CID, Sergeant of Police).
 Mr Sriwardene (CID Police Driver).

"The Bastiampillai party came in search of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam at about 6am on April 7, 1978 with SMG, shot gun, revolvers and pistols, and attacked the Tigers, but the Tigers destroyed them without any death or body injury to Tigers and the car was also destroyed.

"No other groups, organizations or individuals can claim this death. Serious action will be taken against those who claim the above other than Tigers in Ceylon and abroad. We are not responsible for past robberies of any kind. "Secretary, Central Committee. TULF - Tamil United Liberation Front; UNP - United National Party; SLFP - Sri Lanka Freedom Party; KKS - Kankesanthurai; VVT - Valvetiturai; CID - Criminal Investigation Department; MP - Member of Parliament."

The *Virakesari* news story created the impact Uma anticipated. People, especially the Tamils, came to know that an organization had been formed to fight Sinhala oppression. Jaffna journalists who worked for the Tamil provincial daily *Eelanadu* and for *Saturday Review* told me that the news was received with admiration. "Our boys have done it," was the general feeling, they said. The letters posted to the CID and the police were passed on to President Jayewardene. He was



J.R. Jayawardene

annoyed, angry. As usual, he ordered a crackdown, but did not stop with that. He told Home Affairs Minister K. W. Devanayagam to prepare an urgent legislation to ban the LTTE and similar organizations. He also told Industries Minister Cyril Mathew to step up his Tamil-bashing.

TELO Strikes

Not to be outdone by the LTTE, Thangathurai's group, strengthened by the return of Kuttimani, who was released along with JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera by Jayewardene when he assumed office as prime minister, struck on 6 May. Inspector K. Pathmanathan was next in rank to Bastiampillai and equally informed about Tamil militants. After the murder of Bastiampillai he was asked to look after the work of the Jaffna branch of the CID. Thangathurai reasoned that, if they could kill Pathmanathan, the police network on which Jayewardene depended to eliminate the Tamil militants would be disrupted.

Thangathurai placed his men to monitor Pathmanathan's movements in front of his house in Mudamavadi, Nallur in the evening of 6 May. By dusk, he was informed that Pathmanathan had gone out with his wife in his car. Thangathurai and his colleagues went to Pathmanathan's house and told one of his five children they had come to talk to Pathmanathan's wife about a marriage registration. She was a Registrar of Marriages. The child told the visitors her parents had gone to visit a friend and would return soon. Thangathurai told the child they would wait on the road until their parents returned.

They waited near the gate until Pathmanathan returned. Jagan shot Pathmanathan point blank when he got down from the car and walked to open the gate. Pathmanathan, 55, collapsed and died on the spot. The killers disappeared without a trace.

Pathmanathan's slaying made clear the militants were intent in destroying the police network, which rendered Devanayagam's search for legislation against them urgent. He came up with the Bill for the Proscription of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and Other Similar Organizations. It was referred to the Constitutional Court by Jayewardene as an urgent legislation. Devanayagam went before the court, which met in one of the Committee rooms of the parliament, to explain its urgency. I covered the proceedings of the court for the *Daily News*.

The court was concerned about the wide powers the bill gave the police and the army. The Bill gave the police and the army unimpeded powers of search, arrest and detention and the penalty for offences under the act included seizure of property and capital punishment. The opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party, through its lawyer, raised the fear of misuse of the law by the government to stifle trade union activity. Devanayagam assured the court that fear was baseless as the operation of the law was limited for one year. Asked by the court whether the government would go for its extension Devanayagam answered, "We don't need the law for more than one year. The government is confident that the curse of terrorism would be eliminated within that period." The Constitutional Court cleared the bill, ruling that it did not violate any

provision of the constitution, and it was presented to parliament on 18 May and was passed. The SLFP members of parliament voted against the bill along with the TULF. The voting was 131 for and 25 against, with the majority 106. The government made use of its steam-roller majority to pass the legislation with a two-third majority.

The police issued under the law a list of 38 wanted men, headed by Velupillai Pirapaharan. They printed a poster containing their pictures and names and plastered the walls in Colombo and Tamil areas with it. Most of the wanted men were known TULF youth activists who had been arrested before and released. Twenty-six of those wanted men, on the advice of the TULF lawyers, surrendered to the police on 26 May. They included Kasi Anandan, Mavai Senathirajah, Vannai Anandan, Pushparajah, Nadesananthan, Sri Sabaratnam, Sabalingam and Santhathiyar. None of those were involved in the Bastiampillai murder and none of those involved in the murder surrendered.

Inclusion of Kasi Anandan's name in the list of wanted men was treated as a big joke among Tamil journalists. Kasi



Kasi Anandan

Anandan's real name was Kalimuthu Sivananthan and he abbreviated it to Kasi Ananthan to make it sound fashionable. He was from Amirthkali in Batticaloa. He was a poet who recited poems at Federal Party meetings. Two of his poems were hits during the sixties, when the Federal Party launched its non-violent struggles. They were:

Pathu thadavai Padai varathu
Pathungi Payum Puliye Thamila
Sethu Madithal Oru tharam enro
Sirithukk konde Serukkalam vada

Its meaning: Battle does not come ten times, and death comes only once. Oh Tamil!, you are like a pouncing Tiger, Enter the battle front with a smile

The other poem had the lines:

Verikol Thamilar Pulipadai
Avar velvar enpathu velipadai

Its meaning: It's clear that the Tamil Tiger army will win.

The police was not aware of the history of those poems. They were composed and sung long before the LTTE or its forerunner, the TNT, were formed. The police included Kasi Anandan's name in the list of wanted men because he had used the word 'Puli,' meaning Tiger, in his poems. Ceylon Tamils call themselves descendents of the Cholas of Tamil Nadu, who used Tiger as their emblem.

Uma told me that Pirapaharan was pleased with the killing of Bastiampillai and the subsequent developments. With the murder of Bastiampillai the LTTE had wrested from the government forces its first SMG, for him a treasure. With the claim of responsibility and the ban, the LTTE joined the world's organizations fighting for the freedom of an oppressed people.

"Pirapa considered the ban, J.R.'s gift to us," Uma told me. He added: "J. R. had proclaimed to the world that the Sri Lankan government was fighting a Tamil armed group. There was no better gift J. R. could have given the LTTE. We decided immediately that we must seize that opportunity and do something big to deserve the honour J.R. had bestowed on us. The plan to blast the AVERO was thus conceived."

The TULF's tame behaviour when the government enacted the law banning the LTTE and similar organizations angered the youths. They criticized the TULF leadership. Some youths wrote on Jaffna Hospital wall in big letters in red ink:

We asked for Eelam
And got Japanese jeeps

The reference was to the Japanese jeeps distributed to members of parliament by the Jayewardene government. TULF parliamentarians who rejected such benevolences during Thanthai Chelva's time accepted them this time with glee.

I asked Amirthalingam for his reaction. He said:

They are still boys. They have to mature to understand the intricacies of the situation.

He confided to me off-the-record:

You must know your enemy. He is waiting to pounce on us.

Jayewardene was actually working on such a plan, a strategy that failed colossally. His plot was to weaken the moderate TULF nationally and among the Tamils. Then he could force the TULF to talk to him and seek favours. That would lend him international credibility. He could destroy the militants using the police and the army.

He instructed Mathew, whom he had cultivated as a Tamil-basher, to unleash a virulent onslaught on Amirthalingam.

Mathew summoned a special press briefing and told the media that Amirthalingam was the brain behind the LTTE. He cited LTTE's letter claiming responsibility for the murders as his proof. He thus wanted to place Amirthalingam on the defensive. Amirthalingam fell into the trap. He pleaded that the letter was a fake, a police plant. "I have it on unimpeachable authority that the letter was published on the instructions of a high police official. The obvious truth is that the letter purported to be from the Tigers is fabricated by certain interested parties," he told parliament and added that there was no such organization as the LTTE.

Mathew also accused Amirthalingam's wife, Mangayarkarasi, of telling a public meeting during the 1977 election campaign that they would swim in the blood of the Sinhalese people and reach their goal, Tamil Eelam. He also charged that Mangayarkarasi had told a meeting that they would skin the Sinhalese and make slippers out of them. Amirthalingam denied both allegations.

Jayewardene then laid another trap. He invited the TULF for talks on 10 June and gave it wide publicity. The militants were annoyed. They told the TULF not to accept the invitation. Amirthalingam ignored the demand.

The Thangathurai group struck again. June 9 was a Friday. Thangathurai knew that retired Assistant Superintendent of Police Kuttipillai Kumar, a devout Hindu, whose services Bastiampillai had secured to investigate militant activities, did not carry his revolver with him on Fridays. Kumar walked up to Valvettithurai junction to buy bananas and other materials he wanted to take to the temple as an offering. Kuttimani and Jegan pounced on him and Jegan felled him. Kumar's killing was a warning to Jayewardene and Amirthalingam. To Jayewardene, TELO told that it cared not two hoots for his ban. To Amirthalingam, the message was loud and clear: Do not have anything to do with Jayewardene.

Amirthalingam, Sivasithamparam and Sampanthan attended the June 10 meeting. Jayewardene told them that he was anxious to take the administration to the people by setting up a district level administrative system and revealed he was thinking about appointing District Ministers. He told them that he was interested in getting them to participate in making the system work. "I am prepared to give you a few district minister posts and you can administer those districts. Think about it and we can develop the system together," Jayewardene told the TULF leaders. Amirthalingam replied that they would consider this when further details were furnished. The details of the discussion was leaked to the Lake House papers, *Daily News*, *Dinamina* and *Thinakaran*.

Jayewardene had done what he wanted to do. He had heightened the dissension between the TULF and the militants. The militants were angry, particularly the TELO leadership. Their propaganda machinery was put in top gear, attacking the government and the TULF with similar ferocity. The police found that its information sources on militants had dried and Tamil people had begun to distance themselves from the police and the military. Sinhala-Tamil estrangement had commenced.

Do or Let's do

The TULF faced the militant wrath at the Avarangal Convention, its third, held during 29-30 July. At the convention the youths shifted their position from, 'Do' to 'Do or Let's Do,' a major swing in the attitude of Tamil youths. Over 300 youths headed by Muthukumarasamy, defying the police ban on processions, marched from Atchuveili junction to Avarangal convention grounds in Kopay electorate, shouting their new demand: Do or Let's Do.

The procession forced its way to the grounds of the convention, went round it and distributed a leaflet calling upon the TULF to initiate the process to implement the mandate it obtained from the people in the 1977 election. Amirthalingam was annoyed. His hold on the youths had not completely broken down. His loyalists headed by Jnanasekaran, known as Paranthan Rajan, gave a few punches to the youths who distributed the leaflets and smashed up the revolt. Paranthan Rajan later deserted Amirthalingam and joined the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and subsequently founded the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDLF).

While the protesting youths were 'taught the lesson' that Amirthalingam was still the Thalopathy (commander), a girl got on to the stage and sang a song to distract the attention of the crowd from the scuffle. Her song won prolonged ovation. The punch line of her song was:

Thuvakku Porai thuvakku
Thuvakkum Porai thuvakku

Its meaning: Start the struggle you intend to start. But the Tamil word she used to mean start was thuvakku. It also meant gun. The ovation was for the meaning 'Start the Armed Struggle you intend to Start.'

The song mirrored the feeling of most of the youth delegates. They made use of the delegates' conference to voice their dissent. They criticized the TULF leadership for violating the trust the people had placed in them. They moved two resolutions which amounted to a censure of the leadership's conduct. The first resolution called upon the TULF parliamentarians to constitute them into a Tamil Eelam National Assembly and commence the task of drafting the constitution of Tamil Eelam. The second resolution called for the drawing up of a code of conduct for the members of parliament.

Amirthalingam's own men, headed by Vannai Ananthan and Parameswaran, supported the resolutions. Parameswaran was from Kopay. He was involved in a failed bank robbery staged by the Thamil Manavar Peravai. He was asked to preside over the Avarangal Convention because of his continued allegiance to the TULF. In his presidential address he said: "Leaders should act. They should not waste time. People are yearning for action and they are prepared for any sacrifice. Let the

leaders draw up the plan of action. We are prepared to follow them." Vannai Ananthan spoke of keeping the members of parliament on the correct track.

Vannai Anandan's demand to keep the TULF members of parliament under check was the result of an ugly confrontation youths had had with two of their popular parliamentary representatives. Two weeks before the Avarangal Convention the government-owned Insurance Corporation of Sri Lanka opened its branch in Jaffna. Opposition Leader Amirthalingam was invited for the opening ceremony and he deputed Jaffna member V. Yogeswaran and Uduvil member S. Dharmalingam to represent him. The news leaked and over a hundred youths assembled at Yogeswaran's house and asked him not to attend



V. Yogeswaran, MP

the function.

"Amir Anna has asked me to attend and I cannot defy his order," was Yogeswaran's firm reply.

Youths sat opposite his gate blocking his passage. Yogeswaran jumped over the wall and went to the function. Another group of youths who waited near the Insurance Corporation branch caught Dharmalingam by the hand and tried to hold him back. Dharmalingam pushed them aside and attended the function.

Amirthalingam could not brush away the youths in such a manner. He manipulated a compromise by appointing two separate committees to report on the resolutions. Anyhow, the Avarangal Convention clearly signaled the growing youth assertiveness. From a pressure group, youths were gradually emerging to be decision makers. At the convention, they clearly indicated to the leadership their opposition to any move to accept the posts of District Ministers in Jayewardene's government.

The First Plane Blast

Youths were responsible for the decision the TULF Working Committee took at its meeting on 28 August to boycott the ceremonial opening of parliament and the function organized for 7-8 September to mark the introduction of the 1978 constitution. Youths argued that Jayewardene's new constitution was attempting to tighten the noose the 1972 constitution placed on the necks of the Tamil people. It had retained the entrenched position given to the unitary character of the state. It had also strengthened the foremost position given to Buddhism and had made it the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism and Buddhist Sasana. The new constitution, while continuing the official language status accorded to Sinhala, had limited the use of Tamil for administrative purpose to the north and east only, thus making Sinhala the language of administration for the Tamils living in the rest of the country. Youths asked pointedly: You called the 1972 Constitution 'A Charter of Slavery' and now are you trying to support the new constitution that has made the situation worse?

Amirthalingam had no answer. All he could do was to tone down the boycott decision by ruling out demonstrations and hoisting of black flags. He was able to do that by scaring the youths that doing anything that hurts Jayewardene would create communal tension.

Amirthalingam's warning was not heeded. Black flags were flown in many parts of the north and east. A bomb was thrown at a bus in Batticaloa and another bus was set ablaze in Kayts. A third bomb exploded inside a bus. The government reacted by arresting Kasi Anandan in Batticaloa.

These were minor incidents. The LTTE was not involved in them. It was preparing to blow-up the Air Ceylon plane. Pirapaharan and Uma Maheswaran decided to bomb the plane because hijacking or bombing a plane was the done thing those days to draw international attention. Palestinians were doing it. Some other guerilla groups had done that. And the LTTE decided to do it. Four men were tasked to implement that project: Pirapaharan, Uma Maheswaran, Baby Subramaniam and Ragavan.

Pirapaharan and Baby Subramaniam worked on the preparation of the time bomb and Uma and Ragavan concentrated on flight arrangements and the subsequent publicity. Pirapaharan was a known expert of improvised explosive devices and verti-clad Baby Subramaniam, known as Ilam Kumaran, was an expert in time bombs. They manufactured the time bomb.

The central committee decided that the blast should be on 7 September, the day fixed for the ceremonial opening of parliament. Two seats were booked on AVRO 748, the return journey of the Ratmalana- Palai flight. The plane landed at Ratmalana airport, outside Colombo, with 35 passengers. Subramaniam and Ragavan disembarked last, after activating the bomb, and left the airport quickly. The bomb exploded before the passengers to Male boarded the plane. Investigators later claimed that the bomb was timed to go off while plane was on its way to Male, but the LTTE denied it.

Subramaniam is currently in charge of education in the LTTE administration in Vanni and Ragavan migrated to a European country after he left the LTTE.

Uma arranged for his London contacts to issue a statement claiming responsibility for the blast. The statement said, "Let this blowing up of the aircraft serve as a lesson for all aggressors who are under the illusion that they can barter our ideals

or arrest our struggle by doling out concessions."

That was a hit at Jayewardene's strategy of dealing with a pliant TULF.

Uma also issued a similar statement in Colombo and signed it as the chairman, LTTE.

With the ban and the plane blast in 1978 the LTTE joined the select armed groups of freedom fighters who possessed the capacity to bomb aircrafts. And they did that with their very first time bomb.

[Index to previous chapters](#)

Next:

Chapter 16. Getting Weapons from the Enemy

To be published on October 27

 [Print "Pirapaharan,
Chapter 15: The Ban, J.R.'s Gift"](#)

[Send this article to someone you know!](#)

The views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Ilankai Tamil Sangam, USA, Inc., its members, or its affiliates.

© 1996-2010 Ilankai Tamil Sangam, USA, Inc.
Ilankai Tamil Sangam, USA, Inc. - The Association of Tamils of Sri Lanka in the USA