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### Pirapaharan, Chapter 17 Sinhala-Tamil Tension Mounts

by **T. Sabaratnam**; published November 4, 2003



#### Hate Campaign

The Tinnaveli Bank robbery angered Jayewardene and annoyed the police and the army. Jayewardene and his backers stepped up their campaign against the TULF and the Tamils, and the police and the army increased their attacks on the Tamils. The militants, especially the TELO, reacted with vengeance. Tension mounted between the Sinhalese and the Tamils in the first half of 1979, setting the stage for the reign of terror in the second half of that year.

Police and army attacks commenced on 5 December 1978 night, ten hours after the Tinnaveli bank burglary. Two policemen in civils went to a liquor shop in Jaffna town and after drinks smashed up a shop nearby and robbed cash and goods. On the same night, soldiers from Palaly Army Camp went to a shop close by and tried to take away cigarettes. When the shop owner resisted they went back to the camp, returned with more men and arms and smashed up the shop.

From 14 December, soldiers attacked the people returning home from late night movie shows. On 18 December, night army personnel smashed up some shops and houses in Valvettithurai.

Amirthalingam raised these incidents in parliament and asked for an inquiry. Mathew defended the police and the army and charged the TULF of protecting the militant groups. He said: "The TULF was protecting murderers and terrorists."

Amirthalingam objected. He demanded that Mathew withdraw the charge. Mathew refused and the Speaker ruled that he need not as he had expressed an opinion about a political party and not against any individual member of that party. Amirthalingam persisted with that protest and the TULF members staged a walk out.

In March 1979, another dispute broke out between the government and the TULF. In that month, Amirthalingam and his wife, Mangayarkarasi, visited India. The Dravida Munetta Kalazham (DMK) accorded them a civic reception in Chennai. Amirthalingam told the meeting the police and the army had destroyed property worth millions of rupees and had killed many Tamils. "Living in safety has become the major problem for the Tamils. The only option they have is a separate state," he said.

Mangayarkarasi in an emotional outburst related some incidents of rape that occurred during the 1977 riots and said Tamil women could not walk the streets during nights in safety.

Amirthalingam addressed the Madras Reporter's Club on 21 March. He denied the existence of the LTTE and said the 25 April 1978 letter claiming responsibility for the murders was a police plant. He also said the only option Sri Lankan Tamils had before them, if they wanted to live with respect and dignity was the establishment of a separate state. He was asked whether the Tamils would resort to armed revolution to attain their goal of a separate state. He said they would achieve their demands through peaceful means. He was also asked whether they had any timeframe for the achievement for their aim. He said they hoped to establish "a separate, sovereign, independent state in ten years."

Amirthalingam visited Delhi and met with Prime Minister Morarji Desai and Indira Gandhi. Desai took the position that the Tamil problem was Sri Lanka's internal problem. Amirthalingam told this to Indira Gandhi. Her comment was: "Desai and



Indian PM Indira Gandhi

Jayewardene are two old foxes. Beware of them."

Jayewardene had earned for himself the reputation that he was a man of injustice, vindictiveness, political manipulation and violence. In his latest volume of the series, "War and Peace in Sri Lanka" published in April 2003, T. D. S. A. Dissanayake gives two instances to support this view. Both happened when Jayewardene introduced his motion to make Sinhala the official language in May 1944. During the debate G.G. Ponnambalam said,

"It was such a pleasure to appear before your famous father, Justice E.W. Jayewardene. He was the embodiment of justice.

You are the embodiment of injustice." This resulted in a shouting match between Sinhala and Tamil members which forced Speaker Sir Waitilang Doraiswamy to adjourn the House. Dissanayake says Jayewardene himself told that incident to him when he wrote his second book of the 'War and Peace in Sri Lanka' series in 1977, "J. R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka."

The second incident was also related to the debate on Jayewardene's Sinhala Only motion and was told to Dissanayake by Dudley Senanayake when he was writing his first book, "Dudley Senanayake of Sri Lanka," in 1972. When Jayewardene moved the resolution D.S. Senanayake, the Leader of the State Council, was livid. He sent his son, Dudley Senanayake, to warn Jayewardene that he would like to break his neck if he persisted with the motion.

Home Minister K. W. Devanayagam told me (this writer) that this image of Jayewardene .as a man of manipulation and



*JR Jayewardena*

violence was discussed by the UNP Central Committee before the 1977 election. Many senior members felt that image might mar the chances of a UNP victory. Esmond Wickremesinghe came out with a bright idea, Devanayagam told me. He suggested the inclusion of a section about the establishment of a dharmista (righteous) society, a society where justice and fair play would prevail, in the UNP election manifesto. "That's how Jayewardene became a dharmista man," Devanayagam told me laughing. Jayewardene's vindictive character surfaced once the 1977 July election was over. His thugs unleashed terror on Sirimavo Bandaranaike's supporters. It was revealed again the next month, August, when militants shot at police constable Bandara. Then in the middle of 1979, it surfaced again when TELO continued its attacks on government supporters and the police. Jayewardene's Members of Parliament launched an unprecedented onslaught on Amirthalingam while his legal officials prepared a draconian, heinous law against the militants and military officials geared up for a military solution.

### **Preparing the Ground**

The ground for the enactment of the harsh law and the horrendous military action was systematically prepared through an onslaught on Amirthalingam. His Chennai speech was made use of for that purpose. Mathew charged in parliament that, by denying the existence of militant groups, Amirthalingam was trying to protect the terrorist group. The cabinet also discussed Amirthalingam's speeches.

Jayewardene thus pushed Amirthalingam onto the defensive. Amirthalingam issued a statement explaining his speeches. He said TULF was elected on the specific mandate of Tamil Eelam. He had only maintained that position in his speeches. Then, in the concluding sentence of the statement, he climbed down. It said:

But, if the government puts forward an alternative solution, we would be prepared to consider such a solution.

I asked Athulathmudali, the government spokesman, whether the government would come out with an alternative solution. His reply was:

The only alternative is a unitary state, which we have.

G. M. Premachandra, a powerful Sinhala orator, was another Member of Parliament Jayewardene made use of to agitate the government causes. Premachandra issued a statement calling upon the government to ban all separatist organizations. That was a signal to all Sinhala communalist organizations to raise their heads. The Tri Nikaya Sangha Saba, the organization of the priests belonging to the three main Buddhist Chapters, issued a strongly worded statement calling upon the government to take action against those who made inflammatory speeches abroad, bringing disrepute to the government and the Sinhala people.

Buddhist organizations took the cue and passed resolutions condemning the TULF and Amirthalingam. The Sinhala Mahajana Peramuna organized its branches countrywide to pass resolutions condemning Amirthalingam. Some of those resolutions called him a traitor. The Eksath Bauddah Mandalaya passed resolutions against the separate state demand. The Mahanayake of the Asgiriya Chapter, Ven. Palipana Sri Chandananda, and the Anunayake of the Malwatte Chapter, Ven. Rambukwella Sri Sobitha Thera, supported the resolutions that condemned the separate state demand.

The Sinhala and the English language press whipped up the Sinhala feelings against the TULF and the Tamils. Sinhala editorialists, ever willing to preach to the Tamils how they should behave to safeguard the interest of the Sinhalese, told the Tamils to abandon their separate state demand. This is the gem from the state-controlled *Daily News*, under the title 'The TULF must chuck it up,'

The separatist Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) must cry halt to its demand for a separate state of Tamil Eelam. It must also abjure violence-which includes terrorist activities, killing of law enforcement officers, bank robberies and acts of intimidation.

### **Amir loses hold**

Sinhala journalists, like their political leaders, were not interested in Tamil sensitivities. They never considered the impact

their effort to bend Amirthalingam to suit the Sinhala interest would have on the Tamils, especially Tamil youth. By making Amirthalingam flexible, the Sinhalese made him appear too soft for the Tamils. Speakers who addressed the Tamil Ilaygnar Peravai (TYF) public meeting held in Jaffna in late 1978 accused Amirthalingam of being too soft. Santhathiyar, who presided, said, "TULF leaders make use of the Tamil Eelam demand to win elections. Thereafter, they serve the interests of the Sinhalese." At the conclusion of his speech, he announced that the TYF would henceforth function independently of the TULF.

Amirthalingam countered that move through TYF president Mavai Senathirajah, his supporter. He wrested back the control



*Mavai Senathirajah today*

of the TYF in which process he lost an active and influential section of the members, who later grew to be militant leaders. Santhathiyar, Ira Vasudeva, Iraikumaran, Yoganathan were some of those who broke away. They functioned as the Tamil Ilaygnar Peravai Viduthalai Ani (TYF Freedom Group) for some time and joined the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) when Uma Maheswaran established it in 1981.

The Sinhala campaign to force Amirthalingam to condemn violence and distance himself from the militant groups eroded his grip on them. During the first half of 1979, TELO was active on the ground. On 13 December 1978 it murdered police informant Aiyasamy Sivarajah at Thondamanaru, on 1 February 1979 constable Gnasambanthan at Kokuvil, on 21 March 1979 it killed police constable Sivanesan at Valvettithurai, and on 30 June the same year police informants Swarnarajah and his wife at Thondamanaru.

TELO's activities annoyed Jayewardene and inflamed Sinhala feelings. So did two incidents of the campaign expatriate Tamils living in European countries staged in America. The first of those historic propaganda blitzes was by Krishna Vaikunthavasan, former general secretary of the General Clerical Service Union (GCSU) Later he qualified as an advocate and practiced in Sri Lankan and British courts and served for a short period as a District Judge in Zambia. In August 1978, he attended the American Bar Association Centennial Convention held in New York as a British guest.

On 5 October 1978, the *Daily News* Foreign Desk was excited when they saw in the teleprinter a Reuters story date-lined United Nations, Oct 5 calling the attention of its Sri Lankan clients. The first dispatch - the flash - of the story read:

A member of the Tamil ethnic minority in Sri Lanka seized the General Assembly rostrum today and tried to denounce the nation's government, just as its foreign minister was about to address the 150-nation body. But the microphone was cut off after he had uttered only a few sentences and he was led away by the security guards.

The interloper identified himself to the startled delegates only as 'Krishna' and said he came from the 'Two-and-a-half-million strong Tamil Eelam Nation, lying between India and Sri Lanka'. 'The Sri Lanka Sinhala government is continuing a policy of genocide,' he declared. His microphone went dead at this point."

Reuters, after breaking the news, covered the incident in its subsequent dispatches. The first addition read,

"Sri Lanka Foreign Minister Shahul Hameed, taking the incident lightly, began his speech by saying, 'I wish to thank the previous speaker who tried to steal my opportunity and thereby create a little sensation'."

A final roundup read,

"After the interloper was questioned, a UN spokesman identified him as K Vaikunthavasan and said that he was a Sri Lankan-born former judge who was now practicing law in London. His London address was not available.

"He was said to have eluded any check on his identity before entering the assembly hall by mingling with a group of delegates. Once inside, he took a seat at the side of the chamber used by diplomats and their guests and hurried to the podium when the Sri Lanka foreign minister was called to deliver his speech.

"The UN spokesman said he would be 'escorted out of the building and told not to come back'. Earlier this week, Mr. Vaikunthavasan told a reporter that he had come to the US to attend the annual convention of the American Bar Association in NY in August and had stayed on to publicize the Tamil cause."

The text of Vaikunthavasan's speech,

"Mr. President! Leaders of the World! If oppressed minority nations such as Tamil Eelam cannot make representations to this supreme body, then where do we go? My name is Krishna and I come from the 2 1/2 million strong Nation of Tamil

Eelam, lying between Sri Lanka and India. The Sri Lanka Sinhala government is continuing a policy of genocide aimed at the destruction of our Tamil Nation.

"There is every danger of the Tamil problem threatening the peace of the Indian region. The problem in Sri Lanka will develop to be as serious as the Palestinian and Cyprus problems unless you, the world leaders, intervene and help in its solution now. We appeal to you for such help! Thank you. I apologize for speaking without permission. Long Live Tamil Eelam."

I interviewed Vaikunthavasan and Hameed separately about this incident. Vaikunthavasan said his intention was to make the world aware of the Sri Lankan Tamil problem and he had planned it meticulously. Hameed said he took the incident coolly because that was what he could do to defuse the situation. He said he was admired by all for acting coolly.

Colombo was angry. The government gave vent to its anger on Amirthalingam because he welcomed Vaikunthavasan's action. Amirthalingam in his statement said:

"Mr. Vaikunthavasan has very succinctly brought out the case for self-determination for the Eelam Tamil nation and the need for Tamil National liberation from the Sinhala neo-colonialists. The pressing need of the hour is publicity among the nations of the world for the Tamil cause. Mr Vaikunthavasan placed Tamil Eelam on the map of the world when he took the podium of the UN General Assembly before the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka."

The opposition raised the matter in parliament and pointed out the danger it posed to the Sinhalese. Opposition speakers said the Sinhalese were being shown to the world as oppressors.

A resolution, now known as the Massachusetts Resolution, was adopted on 10 May 1979, by the legislative assembly of Massachusetts, one of the States in the United States of America, which urged the American President and the US Congress to protest and to utilize the powers of their offices to rectify the gross injustices which had been inhumanely inflicted on the Tamils of Sri Lanka, also enraged Jayewardene and the Sinhalese.

The resolution, moved by Marie E Howe, the Representative from Somerville, stated in its introductory portion that the Tamils of Eelam, who number 3 million and occupy 8,000 square miles, live as an oppressed minority in Sri Lanka. They formed, from ancient times, two nations, the Sinhalese and the Tamils, and possessed distinct languages, religions, cultures and clearly demarcated geographic territories until the British imposed one rule for the purpose of colonial administrative unification.

The resolution pointed out the acts of discrimination in the areas of citizenship, language, employment, education, etc. and said Tamils were not party to the enactment of the 1972 and 1978 constitutions.

The legislature then resolved,

"Resolved, that the Massachusetts House of Representatives hereby urges the President and the Congress of the United States to protect and to utilize the considerable influence and power of their offices to rectify the gross injustices which have been inhumanely inflicted on the Tamils of Sri Lanka."

It decided to forward copies of that resolution to the President of the United States, to the presiding officer of each branch of Congress, to the members thereof from this Commonwealth, to the Secretary of State, to the Director of the World Bank and to the Secretary General of the United Nations.

Following the adoption of the resolution, Massachusetts State Governor Edward J. King, declared 22 May 1979 as "Tamil Eelam Day" and M Sivasithamparam, the President of the Tamil United Liberation Front and the MP for Nallur, was invited to participate in the official ceremony held at the Governor's office. M Sivasithamparam received the copy of the official Tamil Eelam Day declaration from Governor Edward King at the Governor's office in Boston, Massachusetts.

The campaign of the expatriate Tamils hurt the feelings of the Sinhala people considerably. The campaign for the ban of the TULF was revived. Premachandra and Sunil Ranjan Jayakoddy raised the matter in the parliamentary group meeting of 3 July. Jayewardene announced that a special piece of legislation to combat and wipe out terrorism was being prepared and would be introduced in parliament soon.

While waiting for the act Jayewardene took steps to annex the Sinhala majority areas of the Vavuniya district to Anuradhapura district. The TULF protested. It boycotted parliament. Radical Tamil youths wanted the TULF to extend its boycott to parliamentary committees.

The government reacted by getting Premachandra and Jayakoddy to give notice to two motions, Premachandra calling for the proscription of organizations indulging in violence and the banning of the political parties demanding the separate state of Tamil Eelam; Jayakoddy calling for a special legislation to declare those propagating the idea of Tamil Eelam to be declared traitors.

### **Murder of Gurusamy**

TELO reacted to the escalating tension by assassinating Inspector Gurusamy on 1 July 1979. Gurusamy was one of the two Tamil police inspectors called by the Sansoni Commission to give evidence about the 1977 incidents in Jaffna. The other, Inspector Thamothersampillai, told the commission that men from Jaffna police were involved in setting fire to shops and the Jaffna market. He said they were not in uniform and did not wear their number plates.

Inspector Gurusamy tried to shield the police on the two core issues concerning the conduct of the police on 16 and 17

August. The first concerned the burning of Jaffna's Old Market. He said police officers were not involved. The second was about the sending of a police message which said Sinhalese living in Jaffna were being attacked and the Buddhist temple Naga Vihara was being burnt. He tried to hide the fact that Inspector Nanayakkara, the Officer-in-charge, Jaffna Police dictated that message. He was a friend of Ronnie Gunasinghe, Assistant Superintendent of Police, Jaffna. When Gurusamy's evidence appeared in the newspapers Tamil people were angry. He was called all kinds of names including traitor. He was provided with an automatic revolver to protect himself. Thangathurai's group decided to kill him.



*Thangathurai about 1980*

The task of killing Gurusamy was given to Kuttimani, Jegan and Oberoi Thevan. Thevan came to be known as Oberoi Thevan because he worked at Hotel Oberoi in Colombo for some time before he joined TELO. The task of shooting Gurusamy was assigned to Thevan. Gurusamy's house was at Oodumadam in Jaffna. When the firing squad went to Gurusamy's house, a wedding ceremony was on at the next house. The loudspeaker was on and firecrackers were lit. Kuttimani knocked at Gurusamy's door. The plan was for Thevan to fire at Gurusamy as he walked towards the door. Thevan, who had positioned himself near the window, was nervous when he saw Gurusamy. He started shivering. That was Thevan's first murder.

"Sudada," (Fire) Kuttimani ordered Thevan.

Thevan was still shivering.

"Dai! Sudada," shouted Kuttimani.

Thevan fired.

Firecrackers were bursting and the assassins rode away on the bicycles on which they had come.

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