

# Pirapaharan

By: T. Sabaratnam

## 9. TNT matures into the LTTE

### The need for a Veeran

The Duraiappah murder delivered the message Pirapaharan wanted to convey: a new force prepared to hit back had entered the Tamil scene.

That created a tremendous impact among the Tamils and the Sinhalese. Among the Tamils, the need for a Subash Chandra Bose had been felt for some time. Thanthai Chelva, adored as Eelathu Gandhi, who provided the father-figure Tamils required, had failed. His path of non-violent struggle had failed to win for the Tamils their freedoms and rights and had brought among them a sense of insecurity. Their resistance was suppressed by the use of Sinhala mob and state violence. The moral force of non-violence had been spurned.

Tamils needed a stronger, fiercer force that could hit back, a Strongman or a *Veeran* [warrior hero]. Duraiappah's murder provided the Tamil people that stronger force, a group of boys willing to hit back at the risk of their lives. The manner in which Tamil people reacted to the Duraiappah murder showed their feeling clearly. They were sad that a people-friendly mayor was killed. They were, at the same time, happy that a traitor who helped Sirimavo Bandaranaike - who enacted a constitution that enslaved the Tamil people - was killed. Their hatred of Sirimavo Bandaranaike, whom they considered



**Sirimavo Bandaranaike**

the Queen of Sinhala extremism, was so intense they were prepared to sacrifice a popular politician.

The immediate reaction of the conservative Jaffna man to the Duraiappah slaying was one of adoration. 'Boys have done it. Our boys have taught the necessary lesson. We have a new force that can hit back.' They were proud of what the boys had done.

## Weakening the Brake

The Sinhala reaction was one of anger. They attacked the moderate Tamil leadership and accused them of being the "brains behind the boys." Intelligence reports sent by the Tamil United Front (TUF) desk of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) blamed the TUF, particularly Amirthalingam, for the violence. One report read: "Amirthalingam is the brain behind all the violent groups. Leaders of all groups meet him regularly."

The report was not completely false. During the Tamil Youth Forum (TYF) days Pirapaharan, Thangathurai, Kuttimani, Sri Sabaratnam, Satyaseelan, Muthukumaraswamy and Varatharajah Perumal used to meet Amirthalingam regularly. They exhibited special affection for Amirthalingam. Thanthai Chelva deputed Amirthalingam to be in touch with the revolting youths. He used Amirthalingam as a break. Sinhala journalists and politicians, some of them rabid communalists, failed to realize that. They attacked Amirthalingam and weakened the hold he had on the violent youth.

The Duraiappah murder was a profound shock for Sirimavo Bandaranaike.



**Sirimavo Bandaranaike**

She ordered a police crack-down on Tamil militants. Police was told to arrest the murderers before Duraiappah's funeral. Police swept all the known members of the TYF into jail. With a week, July 28 to August 4, they arrested:

K Sivanandan, A Mahendra, Namasivayam Anandavinayagam, Somasundaram Senathirajah, M Sinniah Kuventhirarajah, A Mylvaganam Rajakulasuriar, Ananda Poopathy Balavadivetkaran, Sivaramalingam Chandrakumar, Sivaramalingam Suriakumar, Thambithurai Muthukuarasamy, Aseervatham Thasan, K Sundarampellai Sabaratnam, Annamalai Varatharajah, S Appathurai Nithianandan, Sithamparam Pushparajah, Ramalingam Calendaran, Ponnuthurai Satkunaligam, Kurululesingam, T Jeevarajah, M Balaratnam, P Veeravagu, K Utharsen, K Sivajeyam, Thambipillai Santhathiar, Amithalingam Anandakumar, Vaithulingam Sritharan and some others. None of them knew about the murder. None of them was aware of the existence of the Tamil New Tigers (TNT). However, the Sinhala-controlled media boasted that the murders had been

caught.

Those connected with the murder were arrested during late August and September. That was during the search for lower-ranked members of the TYF. These were some who were taken in: V Sathasivam Sathanandasivan, Somu Kulasingam, Selvaratnam Selvakumar, Ratnapala, Joga Chandran, Rajendram Jeyarajah, Visvajothy Ratnam, P Kalapathy, S Loganathan, Arumugam Kirubakaran, Ranjan, Varithamby Sivarajah, Muthuthamby Vasanthakumar, Mary Alphorns.

Of these, Arumugam Kirubakaran was arrested on 21 August 1975 and Kalapathy was arrested on 19 September 1975. They spilled the beans. It was through them that the existence of the TNT and its leader came to be known.

Kirubakaran and Kalapathy fell into the hands of the police as they had ignored Pirapaharan's instructions: not to sleep in their homes and to be constantly armed. They were caught when police raided their homes. They did not have any weapon with them. Their explanation for this failure was that they had no arms to carry. There were only two revolvers with the TNT at that time and they were taken by Pirapaharan and Patkunarajah. Pirapaharan carried with him the rusty revolver he used to shoot Duraiappah. Pirapaharan had taught them the use of kitchen knives and chillie powder for self-defence. He had told them to carry at least a kitchen knife with them.

Pirapaharan and his colleagues drove away in Duraiappah's car after the murder to Neerveli, abandoned the car there and walked in different directions. Pirapaharan walked to the house of a trusted contact and told him he wanted to sleep in his home. His contact was not aware of the Duraiappah shooting. Pirapaharan did not drop even a hint about the murder. He took the revolver out, placed it under his pillow and dozed off. When the contact woke up in the morning, Pirapaharan was gone. A little later the village was talking about the assassination, the first political murder in recent Tamil history, an event that also altered the course of Sri Lankan history.

It is Pirapaharan's habit not to talk about his plans or actions. He refrains from even dropping hints. He is also careful about his security. After the murder, he avoided the hideouts known to his three accomplices. He did not want to take the risk of being caught through the information drawn out of his three colleagues if they were caught. Pirapaharan was advised by his friends to flee to Tamil Nadu. He declined. He told his friends that was not the time to run away. He should be in Jaffna to capitalize on the impact the Duraiappah murder had created.

Jaffna youths had heard Pirapaharan's name before. Now, the halo of Duraiappah's murder had made him a hero. His group, the TNT, had earned a name for itself. Some youths wanted to join him. One such youth was S. Subramaniam. Known as 'Baby,' he was operating on his own.



(L-R) V.Balakumaran, Baby Subramaniam and Mr.Thangan  
(*TamilNet*, 2003)

The Duraiappah murder had converted him into a Pirapaharan fan. He still is. He is his Education *Porupalar* (minister) in the Vanni administration.

While Pirapaharan was consolidating himself in Jaffna, Jayewardene was building himself in the south. He resigned his Colombo South parliamentary seat on 22 May 1975, the third anniversary of the Republican constitution. The issue was the term of office of the National State Assembly. The 1972 constitution laid the term as five years from the date the constitution came into operation. Jayewardene challenged it. He said people elected the Sirimavo Bandaranaike government for a period of five years at the 1970 election. He resigned his seat at the end of five years and challenged the government to test public opinion. The by-election was held on 18



July and Thondaman, one of the TUF presidents, openly supported Jayewardene. The Federal Party and the Tamil Congress, the other constituents of the TUF canvassed for Jayewardene in secret. Jayewardene won by a majority of 25,801 votes.

**Thondamon**

While Pirapaharan and Jayewardene were consolidating their positions, the Sirimavo Bandaranaike government was writhing with internal bickering. Felix R. Dias Bandaranaike, who opposed the LSSP- CP nationalization program, manipulated the ouster of the LSSP from the government, which subsequently led to the withdrawal of the Communist Party from the government.

### **Bank Robberies**

The sacked LSSP reacted with anger and vengeance. It moved a vote of no-confidence against the prime minister, charging her with misuse of power for personal financial benefit. LSSP leaders alleged that the prime minister had sold a portion of her coconut estate during the period the Land Reform Law was enacted, beating the very purpose of the law. The motion, though defeated, damaged her reputation. The LSSP supported another no-confidence motion against Justice Minister Felix R. Dias Bandaranaike, accusing him of misuse of power to harass opposition opponents.

While this destructive match was consuming the time of the Sinhala leader,s Pirapaharan quietly went to Vanni, which he built later into his stronghold, and set up his training camps in Vavuniya. Pirapaharan, who had roamed widely the wild woods of Vanni during his boyhood where his father Velupillai was a land officer, knew that territory of thick forest would be his fall back when the armed might of the state struck back.

Pirapaharan established his first training camp in an out-of-the-way place two miles (three kilometers) from Vavuniya town. He named it '*Poonthoddam*' meaning Flower Garden. It was a 40- acre farm with well- laid flower gardens, vegetable plots, paddy fields and thick jungle in the rear. In the bosom of the jungle, he built huts where militants were taught martial arts and were given shooting practice.

New recruits taken to Poonthodam were made to work in the vegetable plots and in the paddy fields which provided the ice and vegetables the camp required. The cadres received military training in the mornings and evenings. Pirapaharan was very particular that they learn to shoot accurately. Cutouts of men and marked spots on trees served as targets. Pirapaharan visited the shooting grounds very often and supervised the training.

One of his former trainers, now with EROS, described to me one of Pirapaharan's revolver shooting demonstrations. "He walked up slowly; revolver tucked into his waist belt, took a sudden u-turn, whipped out the revolver in a flash and fired at the red spot marked on the tree. He smiled with satisfaction as the bullet hit the target," he said. He added that Pirapaharan was a hard taskmaster. "He gets angry if you miss the target. 'If you miss your shot the enemy will shoot you,' he shouts," he said.

Pirapaharan needed money to run the training camp. He initiated an internal discussion about ways of raising money. They could not do it openly because police was constantly on the lookout for them and the people were scared to fund them. They decided to follow the JVP example and rob banks. 'Was it not immoral' was the main objection raised by some in the central committee. Banks deal with people's money. Can a militant movement fighting for the rights of the people rob people's money? Pirapaharan, it is said, suggested the way out of this dilemma. "Let's rob a state bank," he said. The additional reason he gave to support his suggestion to rob a state bank was: The Sri Lankan government, which collected taxes from all the people, neglected the Tamil areas in national development schemes.

Therefore, it is not immoral to rob the government to finance the Tamil liberation struggle.

Pirapaharan then planned the robbery meticulously. He detailed some cadres to plan the robbery. He discussed with that group all aspects of the plan. They were asked to watch the time of the opening of the bank, when business started, the rush and lean times, where cash and jewelry were kept, the number of men who should take part in the operation, the mode of travel to the bank and the get-away. Every detail was observed, discussed and incorporated into the plan and practiced.

On 5 March 1976, Pirapaharan led a selected group into the People's Bank branch at Puttur after it commenced business, waved the pistols and ordered all employees to gather in the manager's cubicle. The awe-struck employees obeyed. They were ordered to stand with their hands raised. Two groups went to the cashier and the strong room. They gathered the cash and jewelry in two separate gunny bags and left saying: Sorry for the inconvenience. They carried away Rs.500,000 in notes and Rs. 200,000 worth of jewels. Jaffna's first robbery was over in just five minutes.

The bank robbery shook the government and the police and the government ordered the wiping out of the TNT. The police headquarters in Colombo set up a special intelligence squad in Jaffna to deal with armed groups. The intelligence experts, who hitherto recorded the speeches of Tamil politicians and their activities, were told to collect information about the militants. Inspectors Bastiampillai and Pathmanathan were two of the officers who handled that job. They started to build a network of informants.

Enthused by TNT's success in robbing the Puttur bank, the Eelam Liberation Organization (ELO) robbed the Rural Bank of the Puloly Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society. Unlike the People's Bank, Rural Banks are not state banks, They provide credit for farmers. ELO, which talked about social reformation, robbed poor people's money. The gang, led by Varatharaja Perumal, was arrested and the loot, cash and jewellery, recovered. Others arrested were Hens Mohan, Chandra Mohan, and Thanga Mahendran. The Bank manager, Velupillai Balakumar, was also arrested and charged with connivance. Inspector Pathmanathan made the arrests. ELO was decimated and the group automatically disappeared, the only instance in the history of Tamil militancy in which leaders deserted en masse their organization.

### **The Founding of the LTTE**

Emboldened by the success of the Duraiappah murder and the Puttur bank robbery, Pirapaharan decided to put his long time dream of setting up an urban guerilla outfit into operation. He had prepared for it from the time he was in Tamil Nadu. He decided on a name. It should have the name 'Tamil Eelam', the land of his dream. It was not the Eelam Suntharalingam proposed in 1960. Eelam in Tamil literature denoted Sri Lanka, the entire country. Pirapaharan was not concerned about the entirety of the country. He was only concerned

about the northern and eastern portion, the region that was historically under Tamil control, the Tamil homeland.

The word 'Tiger' should be in the name, he decided. Tiger was the insignia of the ancient Tamil Chola kingdom. It was under the Cholas that Tamils reached the height of their civilization and power. Then the word 'Liberation' should also be in it. His movement is going to be a liberation struggle, a struggle to liberate the Tamils from Sinhala oppression. The name finally evolved was Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, LTTE in brief.

Pirapaharan had already prepared a logo. While in Madurai he got an Indian artist to draw it. He told him his idea: the head of a roaring Tiger, paws outstretched, with two rifles and .33 bullets set against a circle ringing the tiger's head. When the artist showed him the sketch



Pirapaharan was thrilled.

He had also prepared the draft of the constitution. The objectives he formulated were;

- Total independence of Tamil Eelam.
- The establishment of a sovereign, socialist democratic people's government.
- Abolition of all forms of exploitation, the caste system in particular.
- Establishment of a socialist mode of production.
- Uphold armed revolutionary struggle; an extension of the political struggle for liberation.
- Guerrilla warfare will be gradually and systematically transformed into a genuine people's war of liberation

The organization was to be headed by a 5-member Central Committee. It was to have both a political and a military wing. It laid down a strict code of conduct for its members which included a ban on tobacco, alcohol, sex, family connections and joining other organizations or forming new ones after leaving the organization.

The constitution was adopted by the new Central Committee elected on 5 May 1976, thus transforming the TNT into LTTE from that day. Pirapaharan was elected the political leader and military commander. The other members of the first central committee were: Nagarajah, Sellakili, Iyer and Vichchveswaran.

Pirapaharan divided the military activities of the LTTE into three main divisions. They were;

- Elimination of the police intelligence network and traitors,
- Crippling the administrative structure Sri Lanka Government, and
- Destroying army camps and bringing the areas under their control under the LTTE control and setting up administrative structures which would lay the foundation for the self-rule of Tamil Eelam.

Pirapaharan foresaw a long-drawn out struggle and organized the LTTE as an urban guerilla movement, which he said was best suited to a numerically smaller community and the best method to mobilize the masses.

In an interview he explained:

*Guerrilla warfare is really mass struggle. It is not in conflict with mass struggle. Guerrilla warfare is the highest form of mass struggle. When it takes root in the hearts of the entire populace and reflects their aspirations, it becomes a mass struggle. My object is to achieve this purpose of making all take*

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#### **Annex: The Struggle for Tamil Eelam and the Liberation Tigers**

This political pamphlet attempts to sketch a brief outline of the Tamil National Independence struggle in Sri Lanka and the revolutionary armed struggle advanced for that cause by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. As a liberation movement the Tigers constitute themselves as the authentic revolutionary vanguard of the struggling masses, who, by their deep dedication and commitment to the revolutionary tasks of national emancipation and socialist revolution have earned the name of freedom fighters of the people.

The movement emerged at the peak of national oppression as the militant expression of the determined will of our people to fight the oppressive bourgeois state machinery with armed struggle, which Lenin taught us, is the highest expression of revolutionary political practice. We wish to introduce our revolutionary organization with its historical genesis, its militant struggles and its aims and objectives with a brief historical note on the national struggle of the masses of Tamil Eelam.

#### **Historical background**

The Tamil national question in Sri Lanka is the burning political issue and the most crucial national problem confronted by the present dictatorship in that country. The Tamil nation as a whole is agitating for political independence on the basis of a universal democratic principle, on the basis of a nation's sacred right, that is, the right to self-determination, the right to secede and form an independent sovereign state. The Tamil speaking nation was forced into this inevitable political choice as a consequence of nearly 30 years of violent and brutal oppression practiced by the successive chauvinists ruling classes of the Sinhala nation. Years of peaceful struggle to gain the very basic human rights were met with vicious forms of suppression and the national friction between two nations became the major contradiction leading to the demand for secession by the oppressed.

The island, formerly called Ceylon is the traditional homeland of two nations: Tamil Eelam and Sri Lanka: two distinct social formations with distinct culture and language; having their own unique historical past. The Tamils



have been living in the island from pre-historic times long before the arrival of the Sinhalese people from Northern India in the 6th century BC. The Sinhalese historical chronicles, 'Mahawamsa' and 'Culavamsa' record the turbulent historical past of the island, of centuries of violent power struggles and wars between Tamil and Sinhalese kings for political hegemony. The island was ruled by both Tamil and Sinhalese kings.

From the 13th century onwards, until the penetration of Portuguese colonialism, Tamil Eelam lived as a stable national entity ruled by its own kings. The Portuguese annexed the Tamil Kingdom yet ruled it as a separate national formation, as the traditional homelands of the Tamil speaking people. Dutch colonialism too, did not violate the territorial integrity of the Tamil Kingdom until British imperialism in the 19th century brought about a unified state structure amalgamating the two kingdoms irrespective of ethnic differences laying the foundation for the present national conflict.

#### National oppression and demand for secession

The Sinhala chauvinist oppression against the Tamil nation began to unfold in its devious forms soon after the so-called national independence in 1948 when the state power was transferred to the Sinhala national bourgeoisie. The first major assault of the notorious racist program was directed at the Tamil plantation workers through a legislation in 1949 which disenfranchised more than a million people, reduced them to statelessness and debased them without any civic rights. This infamous act of inhumanity marked the beginning of a 30-year history of national oppression, a planned systematic oppression, that seriously undermined the very foundation of the social, political, economic and cultural life of Tamil speaking masses.

The oppression penetrated into various spheres of the conditions of social existence of our people and threatened the very survival of our nation. The gradual annexation of the traditional Tamil lands by Sinhala colonization aided by the state; the forceful imposition of the Sinhala language on the Tamil speaking people; blatant discrimination and injustice practiced against the Tamil youth in the sphere of education and employment; planned economic strangulation of Tamil areas-all these vicious forms of national oppression practiced by all successive governments aggravated the national conflict.

The worst of all is the state inspired racial conflagrations, which unleashed its terror against the Tamil speaking masses (particularly in 1958 and 1977) with mass murder, looting, arson and rape, with abominable crimes of genocide in which the State police openly colluded with the vandals. Such racial holocaust aimed at the annihilation of our national identity made unitary existence a political and social impossibility.

At the height of national oppression, when the struggle for political independence became the inevitable alternative, the Tamil political parties converged into a single national movement with the formation of the Tamil United Liberation Front in 1976. Confronted with steadily mounting national oppression, frustrated with the failure of political agitations demanding basic human rights, the Tamil nationalist movement resolved to fight for political independence on the basis of the nation's right to self-determination. It was primarily a decision to secede and form an independent sovereign state over which the 1977 elections were fought and endorsed overwhelmingly by the Tamil speaking masses. Thus, it was the intolerable national oppression and the emergence of national conflict as the major contradiction that led to this inevitable political demand to secede which opened a new era in Tamil politics, a new historical epoch to launch a revolutionary struggle for national independence.

#### The birth of the Tamil Tigers

The Tamil Liberation Tigers are the historical product of the Sinhala chauvinist oppression. They were the product of a revolutionary situation generated by the contradictions of national conflict. Caught up at the peak of national oppression, constantly victimized by the police brutality for political

actions, the revolutionary ardor of the militant Tamil youth sought concrete political expression to register their protest. Disenchantment with the political strategy of the nonviolence, confronted with the demand for revolutionary political practice, the Tiger Movement gave its historical birth in 1972, as the armed resistance movement of the people. Structured as an urban guerrilla force, disciplined with an iron will to fight for the cause of national freedom, the Tigers launched a series of attacks against the armed forces of the oppressive regime.

The Government became alarmed at the growth and strength of the movement, angered at the success of its military operations on the Government property and personnel, and above all, horrified of its growing support among the wider sections of the Tamil masses. On April this year (1978), when the Liberation Tigers launched a tactical attack of self-defense and destroyed a party of police personnel which was in hot pursuit to track them down, the ruling bourgeois dictatorship utilized the situation to intensify its policy of national suppression. A repressive legislation was rushed through the Parliament which proscribed the Tiger Movement. At the same time, the Government dispatched large contingents of Military personnel to Tamil areas to keep Tamil Eelam under constant military surveillance and domination. Even with the intensification of the military and the tight screen of surveillance the Freedom Fighters continue with their armed struggle, launch occasional strikes at chosen targets and evade all possible tactics to hunt them down. Though confronted with all odds, and obstacles, the Tiger Movement grows in its strength as the armed vanguard of the mass struggle, grows as the authentic national liberation movement to advance the cause of national freedom through armed struggle.

#### Aims and objectives

The revolutionary political objectives of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam express the profound aspirations for the Tamil speaking masses to gain political independence from the autocratic domination and oppression of the Sinhala chauvinist regime. As a liberation movement we are pledged to the tasks of national emancipation and socialist revolution. Our fundamental objectives are:

**Total independence of Tamil Eelam. The establishment of a sovereign, socialist democratic people's government.**

**Abolition of all forms of exploitation of man by man and the establishment of a socialist mode of production ensuring that the means of production and exchange of our country becomes the ownership of our people.**

**To achieve these revolutionary tasks we firmly uphold that armed revolutionary struggle is the only viable and effective path open to us to liberate our homeland. The armed revolutionary struggle advanced by our movement is the extension of the political struggle for liberation. Our guerrilla warfare, which is the mode of armed revolutionary struggle suited our situation, will be gradually and systematically transformed into a genuine people's war of liberation. To this end, our liberation movement is working persistently to mobilize and organize the broad masses to actively participate in the national struggle.**

**The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has resolved to work in solidarity with the world national liberation movements, socialist states, international working class parties. We uphold an anti-imperialist policy and therefore, we pledge our militant solidarity with the oppressed humankind in the Third World in their struggle against imperialism, neo-colonialists, Zionism, racism and other forces of reaction.**

*Note: This document was released by the political committee of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in November 1978 and was published in "Towards Liberation", which also contained other selected political documents of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.*

**Next:**

**[Chapter 10. The Mandate Affirmed](#)**

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**Chapter 2: Going in for a revolver**

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