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### Pirapaharan, Chapter 31

by T. Sabaratnam

(Volume 2)

#### Unity Moves

On 10 April 1985, the day the Jaffna police station was flattened, the LTTE joined the Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF), an umbrella organization of Tamil militant groups formed exactly a year earlier. The three groups, TELO, EPRLF and EROS, that attended the meeting on unity called by Karunanithi in April 1984 described in a previous chapter had formed the ENLF.

The initiative for the formation of the ENLF was taken by EPRLF leader Pathmanabha. The inaugural meeting was held in the last week of April in the EPRLF office in Chennai. Leaders of the three groups, Pathmanabha, Balakumar of EROS and Sri Sabaratnam of TELO and their senior cadres attended the meeting.

The meeting took these important decisions:

- The three organizations that attended the meeting summoned by Karunanithi would be the founder members of the united front (Kooddamappu in Tamil).
- The front be named Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF).
- Adoption of a Minimum Program of Political Objectives and
- An Action Program.
- To invite the other militant groups to join the ENLF.

The participants decided that PLOTE and the LTTE should be brought into the ENLF. They decided to approach PLOTE before the LTTE. They felt that, if the LTTE was brought in first, PLOTE would be reluctant to join. Ramesh of the EPRLF was elected the secretary of the ENLF.

The participants issued a statement in Tamil. Its translation:

Realizing that unity among the liberation movements is essential to take forward the freedom struggle of the people of Tamil Eelam, the leaders of the Eelam Progressive Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and Eelam Revolutionary Organization (EROS) have decided to form a united front and name it Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF).

We have decided to keep open the Front's membership to other major liberation organizations and have decided to work together while retaining and maintaining our individuality. We agree to the following minimum political objectives and Action Program.

The basic political objectives we adopted are:

1. Winning the independence for our motherland from the domination of the Sri Lanka.
2. Pledge to work for the full independence of Tamil Eelam and decision to accept nothing less.
3. Adopt armed struggle as our path to freedom and endeavour to unite all sections of our people.
4. Building a socialist society in Tamil Eelam.
5. Liberating our motherland from the shackles of American imperialism and neocolonialism.

The minimum Action Program we accept comprises:

- Coordinating our armed activities against the Sri Lankan armed forces.
- Unifying the propaganda conducted in foreign countries.
- Creating a unified body to administer the funds collected from individuals and institutions for the conduct of the freedom struggle.

We call upon all liberation organizations working for the liberation of our people to join hands with us to take forward the Tamil Eelam struggle.

தமிழ்த் தேசிய ஆவணச் சுவடிகள்

The statement was signed by the leaders of the three organizations: Pathmanabha, Balakumar and Sri Sabaratnam.

Sri Sabaratnam, who was close to Karunanithi, induced the other two to join him in calling on Karunanithi to report the formation of the ENLF. Karunanithi wished the ENLF well and took a group photograph with them. The photo was published in DMK newspapers.

MGR, who was the first to moot the move to bring the Tamil militant movements together, asked Balasingham when he met the LTTE delegation the next day why they were reluctant to form a united organization. Balasingham gave three reasons why it could not be done. They were:

- Lack of total commitment to the cause of the freedom struggle. The other movements were not active. He said some of the organizations were letterhead organizations. They do not fight the government forces. They just give philosophical reasons to justify their inactivity. He pointed out that PLOTE's talk of mass struggle and EPRLF's grass-root revolution were masks to hide their inactivity.
- Lack of organization and planning. Balasingham pointed out that the other movements were not properly planned or organized for a freedom struggle. They do not manage their finances properly and fail to look after their cadres.
- Lack of discipline. Balasingham told MGR that lack of finance, planning and organization were the causes for indiscipline among the cadres of other groups. He told MGR that Pirapaharan paid high attention to discipline and told MGR that incidents of indiscipline that were highlighted in newspapers were actually acts of the cadres of other groups. "People in Tamil Nadu call all Sri Lankan freedom fighters Tigers and the acts of indiscipline of their cadres were spoken as the acts of Tigers," Balasingham said.

In April 1984 when MGR promoted unity among militant groups, the political need for it was not there. Similarly in 1982, soon after the Pandy Bazaar shoot-out, when Arular proposed a scheme for the formation of the Committee for Eelam Liberation (CEL), the political compulsion was absent.

### Rivalries

The LTTE was not in a mood to join the ENLF in 1984 and the leaders of the three groups that formed the ENLF were equally reluctant to take the LTTE in. A running dispute with the TELO was the main cause for the LTTE's unwillingness to join. ENLF members also feared LTTE domination.

A statement issued by Sri Sabaratnam in mid July 1984 highlighted the extent of distrust and friction that existed between TELO and the LTTE. In that statement, Sri Sabaratnam accused the LTTE of trying to murder him. He said two attempts were made on his life by the dissidents in his organization and the LTTE supported those attempts.

Internal dissension had plagued TELO since Sri Sabaratnam took over its leadership following the arrest of Kuttimani and Thangathurai in 1982. The dissension heightened in the early part of 1984. The second rung leaders criticized Sri Sabaratnam for neglecting political work and concentrating only on the military aspect, for dancing to the dictates of RAW and for failure to look after the cadres. They accused Sri Sabaratnam of punishing those cadres who complained about the inadequacies in the training camp instead of improving the conditions.

Sri Sabaratnam's statement said dissidents planned to abduct and kill him on 5 May 1984, but he changed his residence and escaped as he came to know of the plans in advance. The statement said the plotters had obtained a revolver and a bottle of chloroform from the LTTE for that purpose. The conspirators attempted to murder him four days later and he defeated that attempt, too, the statement said. It added that the plotters were arrested and detained by the cadres loyal to him, but a group of LTTE cadres released the plotters on the dawn of 16 June in a daring operation. Pirapaharan denied the charge.

LTTE- PLOTE relations also was strained after PLOTE tortured and killed six LTTE cadres at Kurumpasiddy in November 1984. EPRLF's publication *Eela Seithy* (Eela News) gave wide publicity to the massacre. This created a good understanding between the LTTE and the EPRLF.

The EPRLF preferred to have the LTTE in the ENLF, but Balakumar was keen on dragging in the PLOTE. The EPRLF was opposed to it. PLOTE and EPRLF were bitterly opposed to each other following the Batticaloa jailbreak. The EPRLF leadership was aggrieved that PLOTE had made capital out of the Batticaloa jailbreak. Uma Maheswaran claimed that the jailbreak was planned and executed by PLOTE. He played up the role of Manikkathasan and downplayed the role of Douglas Devananda. EPRLF leader Pathmanabha was prepared to forget that dispute, but Suresh Premachandran and Ramesh, his second rung, were opposed to admitting PLOTE.

An incident that took place in late 1984 dipped the interest Balakumar had in bringing PLOTE into the ENLF. Balakumar was in the ENLF office at Velalar Road in Kodampakkam one day when Uma Maheswaran walked in. Balakumar received him courteously and told him of his desire to have PLOTE in the ENLF. Uma Maheswaran arrogantly told him that he would not join the ENLF as long as a letterhead organization like the EROS was in it.

The TULF evinced interest in joining the ENLF after its meeting with Parthasarathi and Rajiv Gandhi in mid-January 1985. Parthasarathi had advised the TULF triumvirate, Amirthalingam, Sivasithamparam and Sampanthan, to forge a united front of all Tamil groups so that they would be able to assert their stand in the context of the changing Indian policy towards Sri Lanka. ENLF agreed to a meeting with the TULF and decided to invite the LTTE and PLOTE.

Pirapaharan informed Ramesh, ENLF secretary, through Rajanayagam, former president of the Jaffna University Student's

Association, that he preferred to coordinate the LTTE's attacks on the army with the ENLF without joining it. PLOTE attended the meeting.

The meeting took place at the ENLF office at Kodampakkam. Amirthalingam, Sivasithamparam and V. Ponnambalam, who had joined the TULF after resigning from the Communist Party of Sri Lanka, represented the TULF. Amirthalingam briefed the participants about his meeting with Parthasarathi and Rajiv Gandhi and about India's new policy of good neighbourliness. He told them Rajiv Gandhi had placed his trust in Jayewardene and wanted the Tamil groups to negotiate with him.

"If our voice is to be heard, we have to act as a united front. Since ENLF has functioned for nearly a year, we decided to explore the possibility of joining and strengthening it," he said.

Amirthalingam urged the other militant leaders to bring the LTTE also into the ENLF. Ramesh informed the meeting of the favourable response he had received from Pirapaharan. "He is willing to work with us, but is still reluctant to join," he said.

The meeting was postponed to give time for Pathmanabha and Ramesh to persuade the LTTE to join the ENLF.

Pirapaharan was willing at that time to coordinate his military activities with the ENLF because an internal discussion about joining the ENLF was taking place in the LTTE following Parthasarathi's advice to Balasingham in mid-January. Balasingham had initiated an internal discussion about strengthening the Tamil bargaining position regarding India's new policy of ceasefire and talks. Pirapaharan was opposed to a ceasefire and distrusted Jayewardene.

Balasingham records the outcome of the internal discussions about the ceasefire proposal in War and Peace (Page 70) thus:

... we assumed that India would soon arrange for a ceasefire and political negotiations. Jayewardene, in our calculations, would agree for a cessation of hostilities; he had nothing to lose. Firstly, for a government facing escalating violence from Tamil guerillas, a ceasefire would have the advantage of easing the military pressure on the state's armed forces. Secondly, the government could adopt a hard line position during the talks and continue refusing anything substantial to the Tamils. Rajiv Gandhi's peace project therefore suited Jayewardene's crafty scheme but would have disastrous consequences for Tamil interests. We could foresee an impending conflict of interests between India's new policy projection towards the Sri Lanka state and the aspirations of the Tamil freedom movement.

Pirapaharan realized continuing along the lone path he was following would, in the changing circumstances, isolate and marginalize the LTTE. India, through Sri Sabaratnam, would manipulate the ENLF and - with the help of the ever-willing TULF leadership - would have its way. His lone move to resist India's effort to declare a ceasefire and launch political negotiations would falter. The only option he had was to strengthen himself by cooperating with the ENLF.

Pirapaharan sent a message through Rajanayagam to Ramesh in the second week of March 1985 indicating his willingness to join the ENLF. Ramesh arranged a meeting for 23 March at the ENLF office. Pirapaharan sent Balasingham and Rajanayagam to attend the meeting.

At that meeting of leaders, Balasingham announced Pirapaharan's decision to join the ENLF. He briefed them of the discussion he had had with Parthasarathi, and about the emerging change in the Indian policy towards Sri Lanka and the danger it posed to the Sri Lankan freedom movement. He explained that the ceasefire India was trying to impose on the Tamil militants would be disadvantageous to them. He told them Jayewardene would adopt the strategy of prolonging the political talks by taking a hard line stand and make use of that breathing space to build up the armed forces. "The only armour we have to defend the rights of the Tamil people is unity. We must formulate a common political and military program," he said.

The ENLF leaders jointly expressed their delight in admitting the LTTE and indicated their desire to have the first meeting of the leaders soon. Balasingham told them about the security concern of Pirapaharan and suggested that the first meeting be held at a top five star hotel. "The meeting is going to be five star event, and it should be held in a five star hotel," Balasingham said with his usual sense of humour.

Ramesh told me that he added to the humour saying, "The meeting should be held in a befitting manner because we are going to devise the program to face J. R.'s five star democracy."

### **First Meeting**

The first meeting of the four Tamil militant leaders was held in the morning of 10 April 1985 at the Hotel Presidency, a plush five star hotel, in Chennai.

The following attended the meeting: LTTE - Pirapaharan, Rasanayagam and Balasingham. TELO - Sri Sabaratnam and Mathi, EPRLF - Pathmanabha, Kulasegaran and Ramesh and EROS - Balakumar and Muhilan.

Ramesh, as secretary of the ENLF and the convener of the meeting, received the participants. Pirapaharan, Balakumar and Sri Sabaratnam knew each other. Pathmanabha and Pirapaharan met each other for the first time.

Balasingham, as usual, cracked some jokes and created an atmosphere of cordiality. But the meeting was a serious affair. Pirapaharan raised two preliminary matters before they discussed the serious development - Rajiv Gandhi's new policy and their response. The first matter concerned the name of the organization. The second was a suggestion to prevent conflicts

among the militant groups.

"What are we fighting for?" asked Pirapaharan. "Is it Tamil Eelam or Eelam? TELO and we are fighting for Tamil Eelam, but your name says Eelam. We must first of all be clear of our objective. We must change the name of ENLF."

Pirapaharan had a point in that. The name Eelam had been used in ancient Tamil literature to denote the entirety of Sri Lanka. A Sri Lankan Tamil poet is referred to as *Eelathu Poothanthevanar* in Sangam literature and food imports from Sri Lanka was referred to as *Eelathu Unavum*. In view of this, the LTTE and TELO refer to the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka as Tamil Eelam. The LTTE and TELO have defined their objectives as fighting for the freedom of Tamil Eelam. EPRLF and EROS do not make that distinction.

Balakumar retorted: EPRLF and we use the name Eelam. TELO did not raise any objection when we named the united front the Eelam National Liberation Front."

Pathmanabha tried to defuse the clash saying: We should not make an issue about the name. Unity is more important. If necessary, a change of name can be considered."

Balakumar said the change of name might not be an important matter to the EPRLF. He added that he would not agree to a change of name without consulting his organization.

The leaders then decided the matter concerning the change of name could be considered later and the statement about the meeting could call it a ENLF-LTTE meeting. By this move, Pirapaharan won his objective of maintaining the separate identity of his organization. The opening sentence of the statement issued at the end of the meeting read: "Eelam National Liberation Front and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have decided to work together to take forward the freedom struggle of the Tamil-speaking people of Eelam."

The second matter Pirapaharan raised during the discussion was about the cross-over of cadres from one organization to the other. Pirapaharan argued that cross-over of cadres from one organization to the other was the main cause of friction and conflict among the Tamil militant organizations. "If any cadre of my organization deserts and joins another organization and criticizes my organization and undermines it, I will grab him. You will also do the same if any one from your movement joins my organization and undermines yours. We must prevent such cross-over. If a cadre decides to leave a movement, he can do so. But he should not join another organization. So, let us reach an agreement. I will not take anyone who deserts your organization and you should not take anyone who leaves mine, Pirapaharan said.

Pathmanabha opposed the suggestion. He argued that such arrangement would amount to the denial of freedom to the cadres. That is also against democracy, he said.

Sri Sabaratnam and Balakumar supported Pathmanabha. The matter was thus dropped.

Complete agreement was reached on the main item of the agenda: meeting the challenge posed by India's new policy towards Sri Lanka. According to Balasingham (War and Peace, Page 71) the following decisions were made:

- To map out a joint program of action.
- To agree on a common political goal: independence of the Tamil homeland based on the right of self-determination.
- To accept the position that each organization could carry out its own operations against the Sri Lankan armed forces. They should coordinate their actions and enable the systematic evolution of a unified military program.
- Leaders to meet regularly and discuss developments concerning India's moves about a ceasefire and political talks.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the four leaders issued a joint statement and posed for a group photograph. Balasingham told the media: The meeting was fruitful and cordial."

The joint statement said:

The Eelam National Liberation Front and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have decided to work together to take forward the freedom struggle of the Tamil-speaking people of Eelam. The Eelam National Liberation Front, founded in April 1984, is the joint organization of three important freedom movements: Tamil Eelam Liberation Front (TELO), Eelam Revolutionary Organization (EROS) and Eelam Progressive Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF).

The emergence of unity among these four freedom movements that have adopted the path of armed revolution is a significant event in the history of the freedom struggle of the Tamil people. This unity, a turning point in the freedom struggle of the Tamil people of Eelam, has helped the consolidation of the revolutionary forces and coordinates and strengthens the armed struggle.

We expect the news about the unity among the armed movements would gladden and enthuse the people who are enduring army atrocities and hardships and intensify their determination and resolve to march on the path of freedom.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Eelam National Front, the united front of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Front, Eelam Revolutionary Organization and Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front, have adopted the following political ideals:

1. Winning the freedom and sovereignty of our motherland from the oppressive rule of Sri Lanka.

2. Not to accept any solution lesser than the establishment of an independent state with the right to self-determination.
3. Adopting mass armed struggle (People's Struggle) as the mode of struggle.
4. Taking forward the socialist revolution along with the freedom struggle and building a socialist society in our motherland.
5. Delivering our nation from the clutches of global imperialism and neocolonialism and leading it on the path of nonalignment.

We have decided to take joint decisions about the minimum political program we have accepted and to coordinate our military actions against the Sri Lankan armed forces.

We appeal to our people and all those interested in the freedom of our people to offer us their cooperation and support to expand and strengthen the unity we have forged.

The statement was signed by Pirapaharan, Sri Sabaratnam, Balakumar and Pathmanabha.

The news about the meeting on unity acted as a tonic among the people of the northeast and the expatriate Tamil community and exhilarated the supporters of the Tamil Eelam struggle in Tamil Nadu. The Jaffna daily *Eelanadu* welcomed it. Many prominent people and organizations issued statements welcoming the Tamil militants' unity. MGR and Karunanithi also welcomed it.

And on the military front the militant groups increased their pressure on the armed forces. Kittu, who was appointed the LTTE's Jaffna commander following the death of Pandithar, utilized the new resolve exhibited by the fighters and coordinated attacks by apportioning areas of action to the different groups and systematically leading the LTTE to the leading position.

The concept of defending the people against the retaliatory attacks of the police and the army gained currency. Kittu took up the leadership in coordinating these attacks.

### Second Meeting

India, unmindful of the ground situation, continued its pet project of building bridges with Jayewardene's government by promoting a ceasefire and direct talks, thus necessitating the holding of a second meeting of the militant leaders.

Pirapaharan did not participate in the second meeting held a week later. Balasingham and Rajanayagam represented the LTTE. Balasingham told the meeting that Pirapaharan had instructed him to inform the meeting that he was not going to make an issue about the name. He said Pirapaharan, after reflection, had agreed with Pathmanabha's position that unity at this juncture was more important than the name. He suggested that the united grouping be called the ENLF- LTTE Front. The others agreed.

Through that compromise, Pirapaharan achieved his objective, unity among the armed groups to meet the special situation that had developed while retaining the individuality and supremacy of the LTTE. Pirapaharan believed that a motley group of bickering, undercutting and mutually suspicious men could be easily handled by India's intelligence agencies. He knew that RAW would easily manipulate Sri Sabaratnam and, through unity, he could reduce the influence of RAW.

As anticipated by Pirapaharan, India frog-marched the Tamil militant leaders to Thimpu. I was in India during that time and did an interview with Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari and spent over ten days in Chennai meeting Tamil Nadu leaders and some of my friends who were earlier in the Indian High Commission who were busy pressurizing the militants to fall in line with India's plan.

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### Chapter 32. Frog- Marched to Thimpu

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