

★ "We'll protect them and ensure no harm is done to them"
★ They're young men of great character

MGR's encomium to 'Tigers'

By Our Staff Reporter



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It should be an occasion for joy for Liberation Tigers of Eelam, Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister MGR has paid them welcome tribute for their selflessness and total dedication to their cause. These young men have strong character. They do not fall a prey to temptations and their sights are set on their goal. They are all men of outstanding and impeccable character, and this is what I see in their most", the Chief Minister has said.

At the function held at Anamalai near Kollam, Sunday the Chief Minister rebuffed the DMK's charge that the State Government had betrayed the Liberation Tigers and the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The charge should properly lie at the doors of Karunanidhi who, as Chief Minister, did everything against the Tigers and the Tamils when they sought refuge here, he said.

The Chief Minister reiterated his determination to protect and safeguard the Tamils coming here after fleeing the numerous violence against them in the island. My Government stands committed to this pledge. It will protect each and every Tamil who is sought after by the Sinhala Government", he said.

The Chief Minister said that Sri Lanka Tigers could not be described as extremists or terrorists. The terrorists behaved in senseless killing as several events would prove. But there has been not a single instance of Tamil Tiger killing or wounding anyone belonging to the Sinhala community", he said.

The Tamil Tigers recently liberated their comrades held in Batticaloa jail. They went to the jail, overpowered the guards and freed their comrades but they also took care to see that not a single guard was harmed. This shows great strength of character and will power", the Chief Minister said.

The Chief Minister said that the Prime Minister's special envoy M. V. Chidambaram had met him in Delhi and discussed with him matters relating to the Tamils in Sri Lanka before he left on his second mission to Colombo. The Chief Minister said whatever charges the Government might level against him he would happily meet them. He had already given a word that he would protect the Tamils, Tigers and no amount of lying from anyone the High Court would count with him. The fact that the Sinhala Government itself was carrying out the genocidal killings of Tamils by Sinhalese groups even when the Tamil Tigers did not molest and wound anyone Sinhalese. The Sinhalese, only the Sri Lankan army and navy personnel who took to committing atrocities on Tamil ethnic minority. The Tamil Tigers never harmed innocent Sinhala people even when they battled against the thugs, the Chief Minister said.

Speaking at a marriage function in Anamalai, the Chief Minister declared that the AIADMK Government was implementing not only the pledges it gave to the people but also various other welfare schemes not mentioned in its election manifesto. For instance, he said that the implementation of the massive nutritious

meals programme did not find place in the manifesto.

MGR said that the DMK was bent on creating unrest and disharmony among the people because of its frustration. Karunanidhi had found out that he could never retrieve the position he had lost; MGR predicted that after the next general elections, Karunanidhi would be taking to saravali from politics.

MGR said Karunanidhi's resignation from the Assembly was totally uncalled for. He pointed out that the TULF MPs did not resign their Parliamentary seats even though they were more concerned with the problem of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Karunanidhi merely wanted to show off that he was more concerned with Tamils and had resigned in an exhibition of cheap stunt. By resigning from the Assembly he had not respected the voters who had sent him to the Legislature. Karunanidhi did not want Anbazhagan to succeed him as leader of the DMK group. Therefore, he created a compulsion for Anbazhagan also to resign along with him, MGR said.

MGR said the DMK was losing its following and even some MLAs were planning to defect from it. Only because of the knowledge that the DMK would not be the opposition party in the Assembly, Karunanidhi resigned in anticipation, he said.

MGR denied that he was not inimical to any particular community. He was loved by all communities and he, in turn, loved them. This was fully demonstrated by the reception that he had been receiving from the people as a whole.

MGR said that his government was doing its best for the farmers. It had cancelled agricultural credit to the tune of Rs. 140 crore. The Centre had refused to permit the State to cancel further the loans due from agriculturists.

The Chief Minister said that the cost of production per unit of electricity came to 55 paise. But agriculturists were being given power at the rate of 12 paise per unit. Is this not a substantial help to the farmers?, he asked.

He appealed to Narayanaswami Iyengar to come into the High Power Committee set up for suggesting more measures of relief to the farmers. A word from Iyengar to the committee and make his suggestions", the Chief Minister said.

The Chief Minister said that after his ministry came to power, dearness allowance for Government employees had been revised upward 18 times. Prices of diesel and petrol had gone up. Still the Government had not raised the bus fares. No new tax had been imposed although the Government was implementing many social welfare measures. Only those who were prejudiced would fail to take note of the many good things done by the Government, MGR said.

MGR said that some shortcomings were noticed in the implementation of the Nutritious Meals Scheme. These were being removed. He asked the people to draw his attention to such shortcomings in the working of the scheme.

Ministers K.A. Krishnasamy, Aranganayagam and Kulandarvelu also spoke at the function.

Liberation still the goal

The Eelam liberation movement leaders are an optimistic lot. Almost all of them are busy marshalling their forces for a showdown with the Sinhalese armed forces in the near future. What gives them added strength is the mobilisation of an army by the Ceylon Workers' Congress President S Thondaman in the central provinces of Sri Lanka.

LANS are being made on a war footing. Tamil separatist leaders now camping in India are readying for D-day. What was planned as a major strike against the Sri Lankan army in late 1984 looks like taking place much earlier. The objective of the various Eelam liberation activists is to fight it out with the Sinhalese with arms. But it is too early to talk of any united front of the separatists.

"We cannot wait for more than six months and I am sure Jayewardene is also preparing", said Uma Maheshwaran whose PLOT (People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam) was involved in the Batticaloa jail break. The Liberation Tigers, who had a strength of around 200, has swelled its ranks to thousands after the violence in July. Tiger leader Prabhakaran was even seen recruiting young boys on the roadsides soon after the orgy of violence struck the island. Prabhakaran is not alone in his efforts. Uma's PLOT, the late Mattimar's TELO (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation), General Union of Eelam Students (GUES), the Eagles and other organisations are gearing up for the final showdown.

However, the most surprising form of support to the Eelam activists comes from Thondaman, the president of the million-strong estate workers who form the Ceylon Workers' Congress. Thondaman's supporters are based in the central provinces which are predominantly Sinhalese areas unlike Jaffna. Though the Tamils there were not directly affected in July they fear something adverse the next time

violence breaks out. Thondaman, who was in Madras recently, disclosed that he had permission from Jayewardene to raise a territorial army to protect the Tamils of Indian origin working in the estates! (See interview).

But what he had not disclosed was that he had approached a top underground Eelam organisation to mobilise an army for him. Informed sources in Madras reveal that the group is already training Thondaman's men. This is surely a boost for the Eelam supporters. All through and after the violence they wanted Thondaman, who is a minister in Jayewardene's cabinet, to support their cause openly and persuade the estate workers to stop work. This they felt would break the backbone of the Sri Lankan economy and strengthen the Eelam cause.

But Thondaman had faith in Jayewardene. He chastised the Jaffna Tam-

ils because they voted for the SLFP candidate, the late Hector Kobbekaduwa, a rabid anti-Tamil, during the presidential election. According to him if only they had voted for Jayewardene they could have demanded justice from him. Jayewardene, Thondaman felt, as a result became a victim of extreme Sinhala elements in his party.

The stop-over of the US defence secretary Caspar Weinberger at Colombo and Hector Jayewardene's trip to China have only added to the fear of the Eelam activists. The political analyst of the Liberation Tigers, Balasingham said that the Tigers have enough proof that arms and money are coming to Sri Lanka from Malaysia and Hongkong with US assistance. The US, he said, did not want to directly get involved. Therefore it may not be surprising that Jayewardene, on increasing pressure from his cabinet, might sacrifice the strategic sea port of Trincomalle for American arms.

What the Eelam activists fear might also prove an advantage to them. They know that if fresh violence breaks out, India might not remain a silent spectator. Conservative estimates of those dead in the July riots place the figure at 2000. Of this nearly 90 per cent were Indian Tamils, the rest being Sri Lankan Tamils. Also, most of the property destroyed and then taken over by the government belonged to the Indian Tamils. This if repeated, the separatists feel, might prompt an Indian intervention.

The various groups actively engaged in training their young volunteers



Going it alone. Uma Maheshwaran (third from left) with three escapees from Batticaloa.

in armed combat are calling back their boys from different parts of the world. Most of them were pursuing different vocations, varying from studies to gathering moral support and finances for their organisation. They are being called back so that they could man the various crucial positions between the training of the new recruits and the final strike.

The Sri Lanka government is understandably quite exercised that most of these groups have formed their operational bases in India and has expressed time and again its resentment at this.

But there is one big broken spanner in the Eelam wheel. It is the lack of co-operation between the different militant groups and lack of trust, especially among the youth, in Appapillai Amirthalingam, secretary general of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). It is unlikely

There are reports that TULF leader Amirthalingam is trying to raise his own armed group, called Tamil Eelam National Army.

that these Eelam groups will unite under one banner, for, in some cases the differences had arisen out of personal ambitions rather than ideological differences. This has suited some of the Lankan Tamil parliamentarians and other "white-collared" politicians to keep one militant group fighting with another.

Some efforts did take place in recent times at Madras to unite the groups under a common Eelam programme. And the prominent groups, barring the irreconcilable Liberation Tigers of Prabhakaran, did discuss cooperation plans at Sunday meetings held secretly in the city. Even this was short-lived with differences arising between two major constituents at the meeting on the issue of who should claim the credit for the Batticaloa jail-break on September 23.

It had been widely believed, Lankan government circles included, that Uma Maheswaran's PLOT was primarily responsible for the operation and that the GUES boys had lent them support. But the GUES issued statements and organised press conferences to claim full credit for Batticaloa operation. GUES said that the PLOT had sent four men, of whom two ran away, only to collect their

own boys from the prison once the operation was successfully executed by the GUES boys within the prison and outside. Uma Maheswaran scoffed at this claim and warned that any organisation trying to rob the credit for the operation would be seriously dealt with. "It was our job, so I want the other to keep off from making big claims," he told THE WEEK.

"It is true that the GUES boys inside the prison did help us in the operation, and that was all to it. The planning and outside help was provided by the PLOT. So also were the highway vans for the get-away, the four plastic boats at the Batticaloa shores and later the protection all along the route through the jungles in the north until the escapees reached the sea-shore to cross over to India."

Such claims from the GUES, he said, might harm unity efforts now underway. A GUES spokesman however reciprocated angrily. "Unless the PLOT withdraws its claims, we may find it difficult to cooperate with them in future."

Differences of opinion might lead to confrontation as happened when there was a shoot-out between Uma and Prabhakaran in May 1982. This might create problems for the groups themselves, besides causing embarrassment to the many Eelam activists and old guards taking refuge in Tamil Nadu. Surely, not a very comforting prospect for the host country either. When told of the great dangers of an open confrontation on Indian soil, both the GUES and the PLOT group leaders conceded that they would not risk a clash in India and if it came to that they would rather settle the issue 'back in our own country'. Conciliatory efforts, however, are on way to patch up the differences.

There are also reports that TULF leader Amirthalingam is trying to raise his own armed group, called Tamil Eelam National Army, through his second son Baheerathan who is a third year medical student at Madurai medical college. Though Amirthalingam denied this, such an army for the TULF is not unlikely. For, in the coming months of strife Amirthalingam might as well raise such a force for his own safety if not to fight a war with Jayewardene for Eelam. The TULF leader is said to be not on very good terms with any of the militant youth groups and so the need for his own army. It would be suicidal to remain unprepared and get caught in the crossfire between the Tigers and the Lankan army when the planned, final assault takes place.

—BHAGWAN R SINGH

'The Jaffna Tamils think we are fools'

S Thondaman, minister for rural industries in Jayewardene's cabinet, is the president of the Ceylon Workers' Congress with over a million plantation workers of Indian origin behind him. Thondaman's moorings are in Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu and he is a staunch supporter of Jayewardene whom he considers the only person capable of solving the Tamil-Sinhala problem.

Thondaman was in Madras recently, where he met Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M G Ramachandran, DMK president M Karunanidhi and a host of important Tamil leaders who matter in Sri Lankan public opinion. Before his departure THE WEEK called on the veteran trade unionist for an interview. Excerpts:

Q: There are reports that you have come as an agent of your president carrying some important brief to the Indian government. Your comment?

A: I am here as the president of the CWC not as a Sri Lankan minister and I do not carry any message to the Indian government.

Q: What was the nature of your discussions with the Indian leaders?

A: After the recent violence we have adopted some resolutions which we have passed on to the Indian leaders. There has been a lot of misunderstanding specially in Tamil Nadu, of the CWC stand during the violence. People say we have not come out with separatism. They have not understood our special problems. We are just five per cent of the population and live in the Sinhala-dominated central provinces. The Sinhala population in our area is about 75 per cent while the Ceylon

Tamils represented by TULF live in the north where 95 per cent of the population are Tamils. So they can take any attitude and get away with it. We, on the other hand, have to find a solution that fits our conditions.

Q: Does it mean you do not trust the Jaffna Tamils to find a common solution?

A: It is true we are both Tamils. But the fact remains we have not been able to work out a common programme of any action except in 1972 when we agreed upon a six-point programme. There were then a Tamil United Front comprising the CWC, the Federal Party and the Tamil Congress. The then government did not bother to discuss our problems and the Federal Party was compelled to enlarge its demand for a separate Eelam state. Even at that time, the CWC had said that the demand for Eelam, even if conceded by the government, would not solve the problems facing the Tamils of Indian origin. The area they lived in did not come in the proposed Eelam. The Federal Party had then recognised our difficulty and incorporated the CWC reservations in the resolution asking for Eelam.

In the 1977 elections when I was the sole surviving founder-president, they wanted me to contest on a TULF ticket. But I refused and contested on a CWC ticket that would provide me with enough leverage to put forth our peculiar difficulties. The CWC supported the TULF and the TULF in turn supported us. And where the TULF did not contest, the CWC supported the UNP.

We had all along been working in close cooperation with the TULF, while keeping our freedom to work out a separate solution for our people. That does not mean we do not trust them enough to work out a common solution.

Q: How do you react to the allegation of indifferent treatment of the Indian Tamils even by the Lankan Tamils?

A: Such problems do exist. Both people find it difficult to agree and adjust to the other's viewpoint. Till recently, nobody recognised us, the illiterate plantation labourers. We are most neglected and condemned as backward, whereas the Jaffna Tamils have been well educated and settled in life. They think they are the elite and we are fools. There are people like Eelavendan who think that only the Jaffna Tamils are wise.

Q: How are your relations with the TULF now?

A: Fortunately, the present leader-

ship of the TULF are quite a friendly lot and they reciprocate our good intentions.

Q: There are reports about problems between you and some of your cabinet colleagues, notably Cyril Mathew.

A: I have had no problems with him. I have openly complimented him in the cabinet and parliament on several occasions. People have been blaming Cyril for the riots. No one has the proof. They simply suspect him. We must probe into things before blaming anybody.

Books written by Cyril are coming out, books like *Budha Sasana* where he has said that Hindu temples were built on the ruins of Buddhist monasteries. We are examining such writings. I have asked the president to investigate such inflammatory publications and stop them. This is one of the demands in the 15-point charter that I have presented to the president.



Balancing act. Thondsaman

Q: What are the other demands in this charter?

A: One of them has been creation of a separate territorial army for estate areas to cover people of Indian origin. Such a force is necessary to protect us if there is another attack.

Q: Do you think there will be another attack?

A: We cannot guarantee the riots will not repeat. We must give the UNP the necessary strength to prevent it and not suspect them.

Q: It is said your plantation workers no longer believe in your theory of cooperation with Jayewardene and have now joined with the Jaffnaites in the demand for Eelam.

A: It is not true. People may say so. If that be true, then why are these people not going to Jaffna and instead want to come over to India? Even in the last riots,

our plantation people were not affected. They were isolated though.

Q: What was the purpose of your meeting with Uma Maheswaran, the outlawed Eelam activist?

A: Uma wanted to meet me. How could I refuse to meet anyone who is connected with the issue? I would like to meet everyone possible and try to see how quickly we can create some understanding between the Sinhalese and Tamils.

Q: What will be your prescription to achieve this?

A: I have told the president that I am the leader of a large section of Tamils. I am also interested in the northern Tamils. So, why not the president and I sit together and evolve a policy and a programme with due respect to the feelings of the northern people? By this, the government's pre-condition that the TULF should first give up its separatist demand can also be circumvented. After all, they (the north Tamils) are also Tamils and they must know that I care for them.

Q: Will the president accept you as the sole representative of the Tamils and discuss the issue?

A: If he knows that all the Tamils trust him and are behind him, then he will sit and talk. We must first overcome his suspicion about the Tamils in the north and if we do that, he will be confident of handling the extremists within his party.

Q: But will Amirthalingam agree to your representing all the Tamils?

A: I do not see why I cannot have his acceptance. Amirthalingam is a responsible person. He is also interested in the good of the Tamils.

Q: How do you expect the northern Tamils to trust you when you have sided with the government while they were being attacked by the Sinhalese?

A: I did not vote for Jayewardene to run away from him. It will be foolish to abandon him after putting him up there. I have faith in him. For the first time in Sinhalese history, here was a leader who said that all the communities must have equal share in the country. And if the extremists in his party pressurise him to be hard on us, we must stand by him and support him, so that he can overcome such pressures and give us justice.

We, as a group, have got into the government to get something from him. Now we cannot abandon that effort. We want to make him feel that at the worst of times we are with him. There must be trust. Without that we are all lost.

—BHAGAVAN R SINGH