

Ajit Singh: The New Akali Sant

SUNDAY



Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam leader V. Pirabhakaran

Sri Lanka Tamil Refugees

**Between the Devil
and the Deep Sea**

COVER STORY**Sri Lanka Tamil Refugees****Between the Devil
and the Deep Sea**

For the thousands of bedraggled Tamil refugees who have over the past poured into relief camps in Tamil Nadu, the hardship goes on. From fear and persecution, they have been driven into poverty, vice, hopelessness and frustration: the refugee camps in Tamil Nadu are today dens of gambling, prostitution and liquor. Why do the Tamil refugees find themselves trapped in such misery? Anita Pratap visited their camps to find out.

Shivam Iyer/ENI



The serpent of discontent has invaded the garden of Eden occupied by displaced Sri Lanka Tamils. The Tamils had fled from their native island home several months ago in a retreat from state-sponsored persecution and terrorism. At that time India, a comforting land, separated only by a narrow strip of sea, had symbolised a haven or sanctuary from the savagery that had oppressed them. When they set foot on the golden sands of Dhanushkodi (the outermost tip of the island of Rameshwaram), the sense of freedom, peace and security had been deliciously heady. But the idyll proved to be short-lived. The tedium of existence in the refugee camps marked by overcrowding, idleness, frustration, boredom and hunger has taken a heavy toll in recent months. Today malcontent is rife among the once-hopeful settlers from the beleaguered island. The Tamil refugees now find themselves ensnared in a no-win situation: neither do they want to remain in a limbo in Tamil Nadu, nor can they go back to the terror that continues to stalk their homeland.

There are nearly 20,000 destitute Tamil refugees who are entirely dependent on the subsistence doles given by the Indian government. They are accommodated in 73 camps located in old, disused school buildings, choultries and the double-storeyed circular cyclone shelters that dot the coast of Tamil Nadu. This correspondent visited some of these camps to assess the condition of the refugees. The litany of com-

**Deepen, a one-year-old refugee:
a bleak future?**

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plaints were identical. The refugees always preface their complaints with a "vote of thanks" to the Indian government. They are grateful for the sympathy they have received from India, pointing out that they escaped death only because India allowed them to enter. But camp life has thrown up a whole new set of problems, for which they do not wish to blame India. "We are complaining against our predicament, not India," they said.

The refugees complain that the doles (generous by Indian standards) are insufficient. The money given every fortnight lasts barely 10 days. The next five days for them, thus, is a wretched tale of hand-to-mouth existence. Two meals a day dwindles to one main meal. Most of them sell their clothes and towels disbursed by the Indian government. In fact, all of them were wearing their old frayed and faded clothes. As the one litre of kerosene supplied to each family is inadequate, they are forced to go in search of firewood in the nearby areas. To add to their miseries, the *tahsildar* who is supposed to disburse their doles on the first and fifteenth of every month has been coming late, often three or four days late. The day the doles are given the women head for the nearby shops where they have to settle their debts while the men go to the nearby barrack shop: heavy drinking is a way of life for the male refugees who are mostly fishermen. Inebriated, they fight with each other.

Overcrowding is another serious problem. For instance, in the cyclone shelter in Chenglepet district, there are 38 families with 162 members crowded together. All of them had arrived in Rameshwaram in February 1985. Each refugee family has carved out a little private space by using saris as screens. In the small enclosure they keep all their worldly possessions: pots and pans, battered suitcases containing tattered clothes, plastic buckets, bundles of firewood, rubber chappals, etc. Seven months of habitation has darkened the walls and floor of the shelter with grime. It looks drab and dingy. Some of the youngsters in a bid to brighten their "homes" have stuck colourful pictures of Tamil filmstars on the bleak walls. As cooking inside the shelter can often be hazardous, the women cook in a common kitchen area just outside the shelter. The aroma of cooking is drowned in the overpowering stink of urine from the septic tank nearby. Their living conditions has of late eased a bit with the donation of Rs 8,000 they have received from a Catholic priest, Fr Singhara. The money was utilised

to build a row of thatched huts outside the shelter where 14 of the 38 families are now housed. Asked whether they were apprehensive about their houses being blown away in the frequent cyclonic storms, 53-year-old Arokiaswamy quipped with his sardonic humour: "We have endured such cataclysmic events. Believe me, nature's fury is nothing compared to man's savage cruelty."

The main problem for the refugees is tedium. As refugees they cannot be rehabilitated. In other words, no employment can be given as they have to be sent back to their homelands eventually. So from morning to night, they hang around doing nothing, gazing vacantly, swatting flies in the heat, taking long siestas in the afternoons or playing cards. They realise how debilitating *ennui* can be. Some enterprising men supplement their doles by undertaking to repair the

fishing nets of local fishermen. But the payment is a pittance. They are paid Rs 10 for the work which requires three men to toil for three days.

As men narrate their problems to the stray visitor, the women cackle, giggle and whisper in the background. Children take swipes at each other, settling old scores when their parents are not watching. Every time a bus stops, the crowd of refugees throng the doorway hoping to spot the familiar figure of the *tahsildar*. They have no luck: it's 17 September and he is already two days late. Disappointed, they turn back and continue to talk about their woes.

As far as health-care goes, the refugees are well-off except when a grave malady afflicts them. Mobile dispensaries attend to their ailments but two inmates, Velu and Thangiah, died because they could not be taken

Simeon Leon recounts the woes of the Tamil refugees



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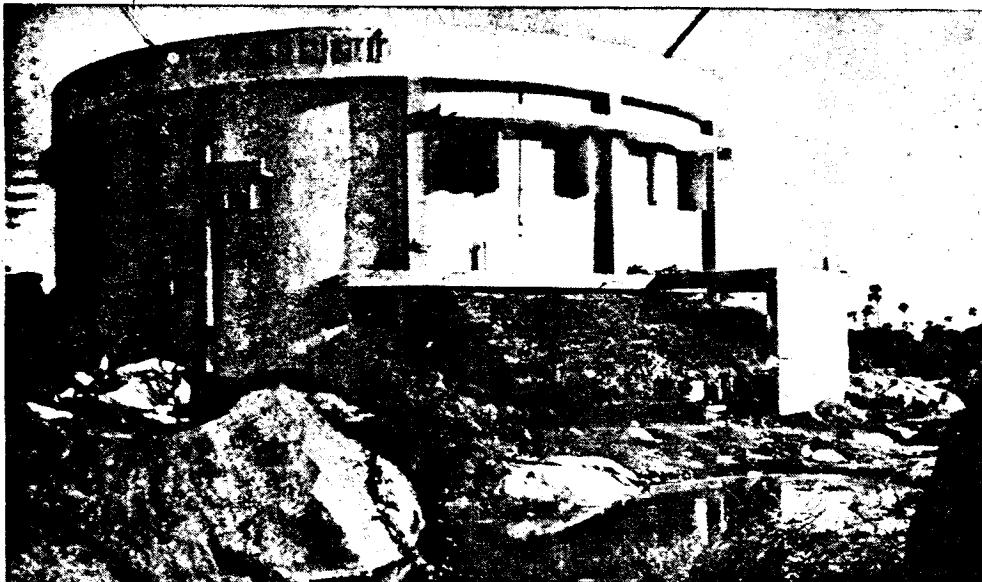
to the nearby hospital in Chenglepet on time. One died of a possible heart attack and the other of TB. The refugees are so broke that they do not have the money for the fare to the hospitals in Chenglepet or Madras. Nagamma delivered a still-born child in the Madras General Hospital and to add insult to the injury, the hospital demanded Rs 60.

Initially, the local Tamilians were understanding and sympathetic to the plight of the Sri Lanka Tamils. Gradually, the novelty of the refugees recounting horror stories wore off. Indifference gave way to open resentment. As refugee Simeon Leon told SUNDAY, "The locals resent us because they are worse off than us. They resent the fact that their government is spending money on us

cannot think of returning till there is peace and till the army is withdrawn from our homeland." Then with a sigh of anguish he says: "O God, how long do we have to endure this existence?" When they return they are confident of reorganising themselves in three months.

Would they return to India again if there was a recurrence of violence? No way. As Arokiaswamy said, "We have no energy left to flee again. Earlier, we were propelled by hope. Now we know what exactly refugee life is all about. Should violence erupt again we will die like dogs before the bullets." They were words of despair. One left the shelter with a collage of images: the old man gazing vacantly at the ceiling, the afternoon sunlight playing on his face; a

before the second round of talks at Thimphu in Bhutan started. The Indian authorities too became stricter, clamping down on journalists interviewing the refugees at the camps. Prior permission has to be obtained from the department of rehabilitation in Madras and even those journalists who are permitted to interview the inmates are not allowed into the camps: instead they are made to wait in the Keloniya Bungalow where a handful of refugees are brought in by the authorities. As they narrate their tales of woe, the local government functionaries keep a watch on them, perhaps to ensure that they do not make compromising statements about the condition in the camps. Based on what the local authorities had said in February, this correspondent had reported how the camps had degenerated into dens of iniquity with rampant smuggling, gambling, drinking and prostitution. Perhaps, the denial of free access to the camps is the authorities' way of ensuring that such reports do not reach the outside world. But for every rule imposed by the government there are at least three ways to circumvent it. As most of the refugees get off at Dhanushkodi, this correspondent went there to meet them just as they got off their boats. There is a tar road from Rameshwaram to Moonraichatram. From this point one can get to Dhanushkodi only by jeep as the rail and road links have been completely submerged following the devastating cyclone of 1964. The rickety old jeeps which should have been sold as scrap decades ago virtually ferry the passengers to and from Moonraichatram to Dhanushkodi which is six kilometres away.



The cyclone shelter in Kovalam where the refugees have been put up

Shyam Tekwani

when they could do with some money themselves. They envy us because we sit around doing nothing whereas they work for 14 hours a day and earn far less than what we get as doles." All the refugees yearn for home. The male refugees want to get back to their traditional occupations, and they hope that India will solve their problem so that they can return soon.

"Sometimes we regret having come here. When we fled to Tamil Nadu we thought it will be at best for only a month. Every minute is as long as a year. Idleness is driving us crazy. Every day we wake up in the morning wondering how we are going to endure another day," said Leon. But he rationalises: "Of course, we had to flee. We had no choice. And now we find that tension and terror in our homelands is worse than before. We

mother carefully mending her little daughter's tattered frock; young men and women cramped in the confines of a circular room; women trying to cook, all the while ignoring the revolting stench of excrement and the uncomprehending wonder in the large eyes of one-year-old Deepen as he possessively clutches history in his piece of broken coconut shell. What is their future?

Even as discontent is mounting among those who had come to Tamil Nadu in the massive exodus in February this year, another influx of Tamil refugees began following the massacres in Vavuniya and Trincomalee. The numbers were not as big as in February but big enough to prove that the Sri Lanka government was not following the rules of the ceasefire. State-sponsored violence against the Tamils had begun even

Venkataswamy (45) had fled from Chudvanthapilavu near Vavuniya along with his seven children when the army attacked the village on 3 September. The family hid in the forest and after a couple of days trekked to Vavuniya. Venkataswamy's wife does not stay with him since she is working as a maid-servant in Saudi Arabia. The attack was the second one on his house. On 3 January 1985, the army had set fire to a large number of houses in Venkataswamy's village. He had, at that time, lost 40 pigs, nine hens, some money and gold. Scared, he had crossed over to Rameshwaram with three other families comprising 17 members (including nine children). The refugees had to pay Rs 2,750 to the boatrunner who brought them to India's shores. Venkataswamy's sister-in-law, Meenambal, had to hide in the forest for four days with her children be-

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fore she ventured to go on foot to her mother's house in Vavuniya. Her husband, Sothinayakam, an agricultural labourer, could not come away as they did not have enough money. Even as she was talking to SUNDAY her two-year-old child, Mangeshwari, clung to her crying for food. In the Mandapam camp there are 5,100 refugees. According to Sri Lampatnam, a clerk in the Sri Lanka government in Chettikulam, Vavuniya district, on 2 December 1984, while there was a curfew, armymen ransacked their houses and beat up the men with sticks and rifles. From that village 52 young Tamil boys were arrested on suspicion of being members of the Tamil Tigers and shot dead. The elderly men were let off after a sound thrashing. The armymen had then said to the old men: "You all know where the Tigers are hiding. Take the beating for supporting them." According to him on 21 May 1985, the security forces went around saying that as per the government's orders all Tamils would have to leave Vavuniya. Sri Lampatnam reached Rameshwaram on 26 August. According to him, the cease-fire was observed only in some areas in Vavuniya. He also said that a large number of Tamils in places like Chettikulam, Adapamkulam, Mudalayakulam, Neriyakulam, Nechikulam, Pulialamkulam had abandoned their homes fearing army attacks and were living as refugees in Mannar and Pesalai. Sivamalai is a 28-year-old woman who had to make a hazardous trip to Rameshwaram with her seven-day-old baby, Piravu. She was convinced that the Tamils had no future in Sri Lanka when her father was shot dead by the army on 6 January this year. Old and haggard Gloria held the portrait of her dead son Kuendes Peres who was only 17 years old when the security forces killed him in January. Her eyes brim with tears as she speaks of her son. She draws comfort from the sudden arrival of her elder son, Susiaippe, who had disappeared in the forest three months ago. Later, he managed to join her at the Mandapam camp. Many young men like Jayaseelam and Amirthalingam recounted tales of torture they had to undergo in the Boosa and Tallady army camps. Their only crime was that they were young Tamil men; to the Sri Lanka army all young Tamils are "Tigers."

One major problem with refugee camps is that they invariably degenerate into brothels. The flesh trade is an easy way to supplement incomes. As journalists are no longer allowed inside the camps without permission and an official escort, it was impossible to gather evidence of

the flesh trade from within the camp. However, a few lodge-owners in Rameshwaram told SUNDAY that several Tamil girls took rooms for a night. Even though they know it is illegal, the lodge-owners confessed that they turned a blind eye because their business was poor. Sometimes after sunset, one can see these young women, often accompanied by their mother or aunt or a couple of male "relatives," waiting in the premises of the famous Lord Ramanathaswamy temple, where all tourists converge. When they are asked what they are doing there, the refugees often say they are waiting to worship at the temple or some similar thing. There has been a sea change in the attitude of the people of Rameshwaram towards the Sri Lanka Tamil

trouble. Since February 1985, there has been a drastic reduction in the inflow of pilgrims. It has now dwindled to about 300 pilgrims per day. This reduction has taken a heavy toll on the supportive infrastructure like transport, lodges, restaurants and shops.

Though most of the locals blame the press and the politicians for their sorry plight, the Sri Lanka Tamil militants are determined to gain Eelam (a separate homeland) for themselves. According to V. Pirabakaran, leader of the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who recently surfaced after over a year, "No force on earth, however mighty, can stop the processes of the struggle for Eelam (see interview)." The refugees in Tamil Nadu, meanwhile,



Tamil refugees fritter their time away by playing cards

refugees. Initially, they were very supportive, warm and cordial. Today, seven months later, it is a different tale altogether. The economy of this quaint pilgrim town is in a shambles with 90 per cent of the 48,000 inhabitants having suffered severe financial setbacks in the last two years. The locals blame the Tamil refugees for their problems. A large number of business enterprises rested upon the daily inflow of about 1,200 pilgrims to Rameshwaram. In February, the exodus of Tamil refugees created a nationwide sensation. Reports about the fleeing Tamils appeared in all the Indian dailies. The stories of persecution and terror were dated, Rameshwaram giving the impression to north Indian pilgrims that the small town was the hub of

have to live with their problems. In Rameshwaram, for example, they have to contend with anger and discontent of the local fishermen who are volatile by temperament. In fact, the frustrated and hostile fishermen are itching to go on a path of confrontation. Realising this the authorities are trying to draw up new schemes to ameliorate the lot of the local fishermen. Some who have experienced huge losses say things like "the whole problem is that our government is so supportive. If they don't watch out, the Sri Lanka Tamils will carve out an Eelam in Tamil Nadu." As N. Chandran, secretary of the Rameshwaram Merchants Association told SUNDAY: "For our sake we hope the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka is resolved soon."

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"We are Prepared to Pay for Freedom With Our Lives"

V. Pirabhakaran, leader of Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam, told SUNDAY

Q:

Why did you choose to go underground?

A: I did not leave with the intention of going underground. I had to attend to some work in my country. I had to discuss certain matters relating to the peace talks with my lieutenants. I also had to assess for myself the situation and reaction in the Tamil areas. While I was there certain incidents took place (referring to the deportation of A. S. Balasingham, official spokesman of the LTTE) so I continued to remain there.

Q: What is the reaction of your lieutenants to the ceasefire?

A: Ceasefire is a drama. Under its guise, the Sri Lankan armed forces are continuing to perpetrate atrocities against our people, massacres are still going on, Tamils are still being driven out of their homes. If it is a true ceasefire, our lieutenants will be happy. We followed the ceasefire in letter and spirit and stopped all our guerrilla operations. But the Sri Lankan armed forces continued to attack civilians, forcing us to retaliate. I find I have to handle the present situation very carefully. The ceasefire itself is a farce and I also have to handle my lieutenants, who know only too well that it is a drama where the Sri Lanka government is covertly going ahead with its genocide of the Tamils.

Q: Why did you choose to go underground when Balasingham was deported?

A: I could have come back immediately. But I wanted to express my resentment at the deportation order.

Q: You continued to remain inaccessible even when Rajiv Gandhi summoned the ENLF leaders. Don't you think your inaccessibility has strained relations between the government of India and you?

A: But I wished to convey my dissatisfaction also, as I strongly felt that the deportation order was unnecessary.

Q: Then what made you surface again?

A: There were many reasons. First, because I was underground there

were some negative forces, certain anti-liberation forces which in my absence were trying to portray us as dangerous terrorists who were opposed to the peace talks. Second, there was an attempt to isolate and single us out as hardliners who wanted only a military solution. Rumours were being floated in the public and in some newspapers which started giving grossly exaggerated and distorted news about us, painting us as dangerous terrorists. Third, the Sri Lanka government was

on in Sri Lanka even though there is supposed to be a ceasefire. We also want to highlight the fact that the Sri Lanka government has so far not put forward a genuine, meaningful set of proposals. So far we have had contacts with the Indian Prime Minister only through third parties. We want to meet him directly so that we can clear a lot of misunderstandings and suspicions.

Q: Do you think the PM will be sympathetic?

A: I trust he will be.

Q: Do you feel that in the last three months the Indian government's attitude towards the militants has hardened?

A: In the beginning I did not think so but after Balasingham was deported I am inclined to believe that the attitude has hardened.

Q: What do you think has caused this change in the Indian government's stance?

A: I don't know what has caused this change. Perhaps, some international crisis or pressure is responsible. It is not possible for us to ascertain immediately as to what has caused this change, but with time I am sure the reasons will come out.

Q: Do you think that India has become more pro-Sri Lanka?

A: So far we have not thought along those lines. But certain incidents create doubts in our minds.

Q: Why did you not respond immediately to Mr Gandhi's summons when Thimphu II talks had failed?

A: Though both the LTTE delegates had come away, one delegate of the other groups was kept back in Thimphu. India wanted the ENLF leaders in Delhi so that they could somehow resume the peace talks. But when massacres were going on in Vavuniya and Trincomalie, isn't it a mockery that we, who are supposed to defend our people, are engaged in peace talks? When there is no sense of responsibility on the part of the Sri Lanka government to adhere strictly to the ceasefire regulations, peace talks become meaningless. The Sri Lanka government gave no assurances that such massacres will not recur. In the circumstances we



A file photograph of Pirabhakaran before he went underground

exploiting my absence and blaming the LTTE for having killed the TULF ex-MPS.

Q: What do you hope will come out of your meeting with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi?

A: We hope to explain our problem clearly to him. Among the issues we want to raise with him is the fact that Jayewardene is using the ceasefire as a front while he goes about systematically massacring the Tamils. We want to try and convince him that what is going on in Sri Lanka is genocide of a race. We want to give him details of what exactly is going

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decided not to terminate the talks.

Q: Did the LTTE kill the two TULF ex-MPs? The Indian intelligence agencies are positive that you were responsible.

A: We are not responsible for the killing. What can we do if Indian intelligence agencies make such claims? Immediately after it took place, we denied the claim made by the Sri Lanka government that we were responsible. The ENLF also issued a denial. Even if the Indian intelligence agencies claim that we are responsible the people in Jaffna know that we have not done it. Maybe the Indian intelligence agencies have assumed that we did it, without any evidence. Because I had gone underground they may have come to such conclusions. If we had done it, we would have claimed responsibility, giving our reasons for doing it. We undertake an operation only on the basis of our conviction. So, if we had done it we would not have gone about hiding the fact. For instance, when we shot Alalasundaram (the ex-TULF MP who was killed recently had earlier been shot in the leg by the LTTE) we claimed we had done it. We did not kill him because we thought it was unnecessary. We punished him for his anti-social activities: he had a hand in the cooperative fraud. We produced evidence of his embezzlement. Incidentally, a lot of the documents exposing his nefarious activities were set ablaze on the cooperative premises. We also claimed responsibility when we shot Anandarajah (principal of St John's School in Jaffna). When the Sri Lanka government announced a reward of Rs five lakhs for information leading to the arrest of his killers, the people of Jaffna came to know the basis of his relationship with the Sri Lanka government. They kept quiet fully understanding why we had killed him. Anandarajah was planning to hold a cricket match with the armed forces at a time when they were killing our people, arresting young Tamil boys indiscriminately, burning Tamil property and raping

Tamil women. We had to do away with him because the government was using the impending cricket match as propaganda to give the impression to the world that the Tamil civilians have very cordial relations with the Sri Lanka armed



Pirabhakaran: a legend in his lifetime

forces and that the ethnic problem is something created by a handful of militants.

Q: Could not the ex-TULF MPs have been killed by some rebel LTTE members?

A: Absolutely not. Nothing happens in the LTTE without my permission. About the killing I want to say something. I met TULF leaders and assured them that we had not done this killing and that they need not worry about facing such consequences from us. I told them that just because we had shot Alalasundaram some time ago, it did not mean that we were against the TULF. However, I pointed out to them that the gap between them and the younger generation was widening most alarmingly. The younger generation look upon

them as betrayers who have given up the struggle for Eelam. The gap is widening all the more because they are not in Eelam facing the people. They have been completely isolated from the realities in Eelam. So, as long as they remain isolated from the Tamil people, they are likely to face such drastic action from the younger generation. The reality is that if I were to give up the Eelam struggle I would face similar action from them.

Q: You mean to say that the younger generation is even more committed to Eelam?

A: The incidents in Eelam show that a Eelam, a separate state, is the only solution. After facing so many genocidal attacks, the Tamils realise there is no solution other than Eelam for them if they are to live in peace and security.

Q: Apparently the killing of the TULF MPs, for which the LTTE was held responsible, has hardened Mr Gandhi. In fact, he did not rescind the deportation order on Balasingham even though he had been on the verge of doing so.

A: We have no connection with the killing. If the Indian government does not rescind the orders because it assumes that we killed the TULF MPs, then it is its mistake. There is no point in punishing us. They should punish the agency that is really guilty so that such incidents do not occur again.

Q: What was your reaction when Balasingham was deported?

A: We had cooperated so much with the Indian government, so when it happened we felt we had been wronged. The incident has created a certain amount of bitterness between us and them.

Q: How would you define your relationship with Balasingham?

A: He is our political advisor. As a true patriot, he reflects the national sentiments of our people.

Q: Why did India deport Balasingham?

A: India has said that he was deported in "public interest." But the reason appears to be farcical.

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Sending him away while keeping us here for peace talks just does not make sense.

Q: Do you think the real reason was the assumption in Delhi that without Balasingham you would not be able to function?

A: If they think that, they are making a mistake. They are not dealing with just individuals—Balasingham or Pirabhakaran—but are dealing with the popular will of the people.

Q: Do you think the Indian government will revoke the deportation orders?

A: I certainly hope so.

Q: Is the ENLF firm on the demand that the negotiations cannot resume unless Balasingham is brought back?

A: Without Balasingham I will face problems and difficulties regarding the peace talks. He is the expert on constitutional matters so his presence is crucial for the negotiations. I will explain these reasons when I meet the PM and urge him to withdraw the deportation order.

Q: What will happen if the PM says he is not willing to rescind the order?

A: Then it will create difficulties as far as the negotiations are concerned.

Q: When you meet Mr Gandhi will you state your view that Eelam is the only solution?

A: Definitely. We will point out that Eelam is the only solution and also the historical factors that have driven us to this conclusion.

Q: But the PM has gone on record to state that he will not support any separatist cause.

A: We will take the opportunity to convey our decision to the PM. If India has another solution, it can be presented to us. But in that case they will have to prove to us why that solution will be effective.

Q: Do you think a fair and just settlement can be arrived at through these negotiations?

A: Seeing the way the Sri Lanka government is acting it is impossible for us to believe that they are serious

about settling this problem by means of a negotiated settlement. During the ceasefire they have been purchasing a lot of arms and ammunition. It clearly shows that they are intent upon a military solution. Even as the talks are going on they are going about driving Tamils out of their homeland and making them refugees. There are now 35,000 Tamil refugees in Trincomalee. Nearly 600 innocent Tamils were killed when there was supposed to be a ceasefire.

Q: There were reports that you had been sighted in Batticaloa disguised as a priest in a cassock.

A: It is true that I was in Eelam. But the rest is all make-believe.

Q: Considering that you all firmly believe that there is genocide of Tamils in Sri Lanka, what do you think is the best way for India to



Pirabhakaran: 'we need India's support'

solve the problem?

A: They can stop the genocide by helping the freedom-fighters. They can help those who are trying to protect the Tamils. We do need India's moral support.

Q: Do you think India should opt for a military intervention in Sri Lanka?

A: I don't support this argument. It will create a lot of problems for India in the international fora.

Q: Has Rajiv Gandhi's attitude to the Sri Lanka Tamils changed from that of his mother's?

A: I don't see any big difference.

Q: One-and-a-half years ago, in an interview to SUNDAY you had predicted that there would be army violence in Vavuniya and Trincomalee. On what basis had you made this prediction which has come true?

A: I knew that there would be attacks by the army in these areas because there was hectic colonisation there. There is a systematic campaign to encroach on our territory and push all the Tamils into the Jaffna peninsula. We knew what their tactic was so we went ahead and developed bases in Vavuniya and Trincomalee to thwart these attempts. Just yesterday (15 September) we shot down a helicopter in Trincomalee. It is of utmost importance that we protect the frontier or the frontier will come to our doorstep. Because of our bases, Jayewardene has not been able to push our frontier in and he will not be able to do so in the future.

Q: What do you think will happen in the near future?

A: The struggle for Eelam has blossomed, gathering momentum with each passing day. There will be a separate Tamil Eelam. No force on earth, however mighty, can stop the processes. The only other eventuality is that, all the Tamils will perish in this struggle. We may all be eliminated so that the Tamils as a race is wiped out from the island.

Q: The Sri Lanka government has claimed that the militants are planning a major offensive. Is this true?

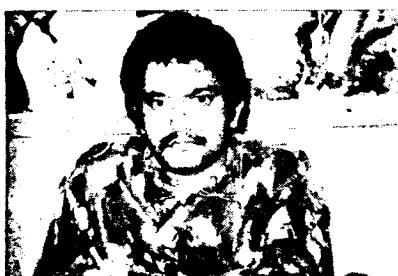
A: We have not taken any such decision. We have never made false claims or come out with exaggerated stories.

Q: Balasingham said that Tamil



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The Sri Lankan army has not gone out of control. Jayewardene is masterminding these attacks on the Tamils. He is playing a double game. He gives his army instructions to unleash havoc and then claims that his armed forces have gone out of control.

civilians would be armed by the LTTE soon.

A: He was talking about the future. It is bound to happen in the future.

Q: Do you expect the Sri Lanka government to launch a massive attack on the Tamils?

A: Yes we do. It will be on a larger scale than what we have seen in Beirut. The Trincomalee and Vavuniya incidents were far worse than the holocaust in July 1983. Such incidents will occur again with greater savagery. The air attacks on Tamil civilians is the first indication of the determination of the Sri Lanka government to exterminate us.

Q: What good can your determination do when a couple of bombs are dropped in the Tamil areas?

A: Bombs and nuclear weapons can kill thousands. But the point is, who have the weapons with them? At the moment the weapons are with the Lanka government. But it is not very difficult for us to capture it from them. After all, most of our weapons are those which we captured from the Sri Lankan armed forces.

Q: Will you agree to an extension of the ceasefire?

A: We are not carrying on a war. Ours is a defensive action against the genocide of our people. If the genocidal attacks stop, we are willing to stop our guerilla operations. But it is difficult for us to agree to an extension if there is no outside agency to supervise the ceasefire to ensure that there are no truce violations. If ceasefire is to be extended, we would expect both the Sri Lanka government and India, that is acting as mediator, to give us an assurance that there will be no ceasefire violations. Some non-governmental agencies like the International Red Cross, could be entrusted with the task of monitoring the ceasefire and looking into the conditions of the political prisoners.

Q: Do you think the Sri Lankan army has gone out of control?

A: I don't think so at all. Jayewardene is masterminding these attacks on the Tamils. He is playing a double game. He gives his army instructions to unleash havoc and then claims that his armed forces have gone out of control as if that would exonerate him. If there was mutiny in the armed forces there would have been a coup by now, overthrowing Jayewardene.

Q: Do you think Jayewardene is insincere about a political solution? Will the chances for a negotiated settlement brighten if some other leader is in his place?

A: We don't think a change in the Sinhala leadership will solve the problem. Our history has shown that we have been betrayed and deceived by successive Sinhala governments.

Q: Are you prepared to face violence and bloodshed on a long-term basis for the sake of Eelam?

A: Certainly. No nation in the world has ever achieved freedom without bloodshed and sacrifice. We Tamils are prepared to pay for freedom with our lives.

Q: But, as in South Africa, the freedom struggle can go on for decades without achieving anything.

A: No time limit can be imposed upon a liberation struggle. Till the goal is achieved it is an ongoing struggle. It is a people's war. So, the death of a few guerilla fighters will not put a halt to the struggle. Often it is the people's determination and international support and circumstances that make a liberation struggle achieve success. We are fighting in the hope that we will see Eelam in our lifetime. We don't want to pass the burden of a liberation struggle to the next generation: they must enjoy the fruits of our toil. But in case we do not succeed in our lifetime, we have a vision to see that the struggle is passed on to the next generation.

Q: Will you participate in the next round of peace talks?

A: That would depend on the com-

position of the Sri Lankan delegation.

Q: Do you think India will impose a settlement upon the militants?

A: No, I don't think so. There would be no point in trying to impose a settlement because we will not accept anything that will not fulfil the legitimate aspirations of our people.

Q: Do you think the peace talk is Jayewardene's ploy to buy time while he strengthens his military?

A: Of course it is. But then time benefits us too.

Q: You have become something of a folk hero in the Tamil areas. What do you think are the reasons for your becoming a legend in your own lifetime?

A: That is for the people to say. Basically, I hate such sentiments because they pander to one's ego. A liberation fighter has to transcend the confines of his ego and his self to immerse himself whole-heartedly in the struggle. We are only symbols of the aspirations of the Tamil people.

Q: Suppose, due to circumstances, the relations between the Indian government and Tamil militants are strained to such an extent that India withdraws support to you, will you be in a position to continue your liberation struggle alone?

A: Do we have any other alternative? Fight we must, till our goal is achieved. India's sympathy is a morale-booster, but should India withdraw support it would not mean the end of our liberation struggle. After all we did not start our liberation movement with India's support or with the help of some other external forces. We will fight till we die. When I die someone else will take over. As Subhas Chandra Bose said, 'No liberation fighter can delude himself that he alone can deliver freedom.' If my generation dies without attaining freedom the next generation will carry on the struggle.

Interviewed by Anita Pratap