

# SUNDAY

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## 'Co-existence with the Sinhalese is no longer possible'

A.S. Balasingham tells Anita Pratap

A.S. Balasingham is the official spokesman and a theoretician of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the organisation that is acknowledged to be the most powerful in its armed struggle against the "chauvinist Sinhala regime" to achieve their goal of an independent Tamil state. V. Prabhakaran (29) is the leader and military commander of the LTTE. It may be recalled that the LTTE staged the ambush that resulted in the death of the 13 Sri Lankan soldiers in Jaffna on 23 July. Mr Balasingham is a social scientist who has come from London to make Madras the base for the LTTE's propaganda campaign and other activities. The following is the LTTE's first exclusive interview to an Indian journalist.

**Q:** Have not the innocent Tamils all over Sri Lanka paid dearly for your ambush where 13 army soldiers were killed?

**A:** Let me tell you something. Six months ago we asked all the Tamils living in the south (southern Sri Lanka which includes Colombo) to evacuate because we suspected an imminent genocide. We had advance information that ministers were planning a genocidal onslaught. Our boys went from house to house to warn the Tamils in Colombo about the planned genocide. We told them that this time nobody would be spared. But they did not listen. They did not believe us.

**Q:** Were only a few ministers involved in this planned genocide or were there other Sinhala organisations?

**A:** Apart from a few ministers in the UNP (the ruling United National Party) cabinet there were right Buddhist organisations involved in this plan. Fascist Buddhist groups held secret meetings. We came to know of the treacherous plot and our boys identifying themselves as Liberation Tigers warned all the Tamils. But they could not believe that such a thing would ever happen. We had advance information that attacks were being planned in Colombo and Trincomalle.

**Q:** Why do you think Mrs Gandhi is hesitating to take up this issue in the

holds the trump card: Trincomalle. Sri Lanka plans to hand over the natural harbour in Trincomalle to the US naval base. During World War II, Britain had their central naval base in Trincomalle. The British built up facilities for refuelling tanks and others here. In 1956, it was handed over to the Sinhala government. Sri Lanka has warned India that if the matter is raised in the UN and international pressure is built up against Sri Lanka regarding Tamil Eelam, it will hand over the harbour to the Americans, thus abetting the US nuclearisation of the Indian Ocean. This will vitiate the concept of the Indian Ocean being a zone of peace. If the US is allowed into Trincomalle, the balance of power in the Indian Ocean will be upset. And such a step would affect India the most. Naturally, Mrs Gandhi's hands are tied as there will be fatal repercussions. The Sri Lanka government has always wielded Trincomalle as a trump card. They had earlier agreed to keep it a free zone provided India helped to crush the Liberation Tigers.

**Q:** But you cannot say that India helped to crush the Liberation Tigers. Despite a lot of pressure from the Sri Lankan authorities, the Indian government did not extradite Prabhakaran, Maheshwaran and others who were arrested here.

**A:** The restraining force has been the massive upsurge in Tamil Nadu and the pressure exerted by political parties here (in Tamil Nadu).

**Q:** What would be the numerical strength of your organisation?

**A:** I would not like to give an exact figure. But I would like to emphasise that we are militarily the strongest group fighting for Tamil Eelam. Apart from our military wing we also have a political wing with revolutionary intellectuals. We have sympathisers in various nations, particularly Europe. We are collaborating with several major liberation movements in different parts of the world. We have Tiger committees all over western Europe. After the recent racial holocaust, we want our armed struggle to extend into a mass struggle. We want to build up a people's liberation army under the direction of our organisation.

**Q:** Does not this reflection have

ple's Liberation Organisation for Tamil Nadu) and other similar organisations like GUES (General Union of Eelam Students) and EROS (Eelam Research Organisation). Even your ideological differences seem to be narrowing down.

**A:** There is unity in an objective sense: we all want Tamil Eelam. We are also united against the TULF (Tamil United Liberation Front) which represents the wishes of President Jayewardene. Where we differ is the means to achieving the end. A common ideology and political programme is important for unity. We are the most powerful extra-parliamentary liberation movement in Sri Lanka. We have evolved effective guerrilla warfare tactics. When the PLOT and EROS advocate a mass-involvement in the struggle they include the unity of the working classes, including the Sinhalese. But how is this possible when the Sinhalese proletariat are butchering our people? Class unity is impossible as long as there is ethnic conflict.

**Q:** Why is that all the Tamil militants feel betrayed by the TULF and are today extremely hostile to Amirthalingam's leadership?

**A:** Amirthalingam no longer represents the people of Tamil Eelam. In 1977, he was voted to power on the plank of Tamil Eelam. Now his term has expired. In May, we gave a call for a boycott of the by-elections. Now, if the TULF MPs resign we will again give a call for a boycott and this time there will be a 100 per cent boycott. After this time's racial holocaust co-existence with the Sinhalese is no longer possible. Our people are now determined to fight for national independence. The TULF continues to reinvoke dead proposals. Our campaign for a federal state that lasted 25 years was rejected by successive Sinhala governments. The right-wing Sinhalese fascists will never agree to the concessions demanded by the Tamils.

**Q:** Do you expect anything tangible to emerge from the negotiations to be held between India and Sri Lanka regarding this issue?

**A:** The negotiations will collapse. India is going to learn soon that they are dealing with senile pathology. They will realise that they can't have a rational diplomatic dialogue with

not sincere and is not committed to a genuine settlement of the problems of the Tamils. They only want to subjugate them or physically exterminate them if possible. Mrs Gandhi, on her own, will soon realise that Amirthalingam is not the man of destiny. He came here with the connivance of President Jayewardene. Amirthalingam is the safety valve of the Sri Lanka government. He is being used by them to portray to the world that they are being just to the Tamils.

**Q: If you feel that the TULF is betraying your cause, why don't you try to initiate a dialogue with the Indian authorities so that the steps that India takes are effective and constructive and which will be in tune with the aspirations of the Tamils of Sri Lanka?**

**A:** We want to give time to the Indian government. Before we force ourselves on them and arouse their suspicions, it is better that they themselves realise the futility of dealing with the Sri Lanka government and the TULF. Let the realisation come on its own. Once this realisation dawns on them, we will step in. This is the first time that India has responded positively to the Tamil crisis in Sri Lanka. Though there have been seven or eight holocausts in the past, India has never intervened before. From India's viewpoint, it is important to proceed cautiously because the Tamil problem is not a regional question but one that is going to explode into an international issue.

**Q: In your fight for Tamil Eelam, are you not chasing a mirage?**

**A:** No, we will get it one day. We will get it by driving away the occupied forces. The Tiger guerrilla war units are now being strengthened and extended. It will have a people's liberation army. Already a lot of Tamil youths have joined our movement after the recent carnage. No more hit-and-run tactics for us. We will stage massive assaults on army camps. Right now the smaller army camps have been amalgamated to form two big army camps in Jaffna. There is a lot of military indiscipline. Moral degeneration has set in the army ranks because they are afraid of us. Their killing of civilians is a manifestation of the fact that they are morally defunct. We have the sympathy of the national liberation organisations of socialist countries. We will drive away the occupied forces and then we will have our Tamil Eelam recognised by the UN. Sri Lanka is economically and militarily weak now. Our armed struggle has already weakened them. They don't have the means to engage in a protracted warfare with us.

**Q: What do you have to say about the Colombo-based Tamils?**

**A:** Yes, they were opposed to our struggle. They represent the bourgeois aspirations of our people.

If India accepts our rights to self-determination then other countries of the UN will acknowledge our right. Third World countries will also be prepared to accept us. Once this happens, we have the right to secede and form an independent state.

They have been investing all their money in the south (Colombo). They funded the UNP. But then, racism always goes beyond class interest. We knew they would be attacked one day.

**Q: Will your organisation involve itself with the rehabilitation of the refugees?**

**A:** Most refugees have relations in Jaffna. The real problem will be the plantation workers. We will rehabilitate them. It is important that money collected here for the relief fund should not be sent directly to the Sri Lanka government.

**Q: But isn't the influx of refugees in Jaffna going to send the economy of the province skittering?**

**A:** In the northern and eastern provinces, we have a self-sustaining economy based on agriculture. Rice, fish and vegetables are available in plenty. As a last resort we can supply food from south India.

**Q: What is the significance of the attack on Tamils in Trincomalle?**

**A:** Trincomalle is the capital of Tamil Eelam. They want to drive away the Tamils from this region. In the past, they have indulged in aggressive Sinhala colonisation in this area.

**Q: What do you have to say about Thondaman's threat that he will be forced to take the plantation workers back to India if President Jayewardene does not concede to his demands?**

**A:** Why should he bring them back to India? They should be made citizens of Sri Lanka. Thondaman should bring them to the northern and eastern provinces.

**Q: Do you feel that Tamil Nadu politicians are genuine in championing the cause of the Tamils in Sri Lanka?**

**A:** We are glad that there is a mass upsurge in India particularly in Tamil Nadu. This, as I said earlier, acts as a kind of restraining force on the central government. We are not willing to comment on whether Tamil Nadu politicians are exploiting this patriotic sentiment for their personal gains. As long as they support our national liberation struggle, we are happy. Our Tigers have a

massive support here.

**Q: Do you think there is a possibility of a coup d'etat in Sri Lanka?**

**A:** I can't discount the possibility. Economic constraints and political instability will force Sri Lanka to seek American military and economic assistance. Ministers take decisions with the collaboration of the army behind the President's back. The army has links with the CIA. So an American backed military government can always take over. Fortunately, India's pressure has prevented the Sri Lanka government from accepting massive military aid.

**Q: What is it that India can do to resolve this crisis?**

**A:** India could have done a lot. For instance, India should have expressed a serious note of protest when they realised that the racial holocaust was not a burst of communal violence but that it was a planned attempt at genocide. Secondly, India should have intimated to the Sri Lanka government that it would take the matter to the UN Security Council. India has a moral and legal right to do so: this is a violation of human rights and also India has a moral and legal responsibility towards the Tamils of Indian origin.

**Q: But Amirthalingam also wants the same thing.**

**A:** Amirthalingam has not requested the government of India to recognise our right to self-determination. But we will. And I am sure India will concede to this as they accepted the PLO's right to self-determination.

**Q: Even if India does recognise this, it does not represent a solution. It is only one more hurdle crossed.**

**A:** If India accepts our rights to self-determination then other countries of the UN will acknowledge our right. Third World countries will also be prepared to accept us. In fact, these nations are asking us to pressure India to recognise our right to self-determination. Once India does, other nations will follow suit. Once this happens, we have the right to secede and form an independent state.

**Q: What do you have to say about Tamil Nadu's political parties wanting military intervention in Sri Lanka?**

**A:** You can't just send in troops like that because there is a regular diplomatic procedure. First of all India should recognise our right to self-determination. Second, India should register a strong protest. Third, India should raise the matter in the UN. Fourth, India should raise it in the UN Security Council. If everything fails, then India could contemplate sending troops. Mrs Gandhi's image will suffer in the international forum if she goes in for a violent interference with a neighbouring nation. Such a step would provoke a major international conflict.

SRILANKA → SHOULD READ AS TAMIL EELAM