

sured. At the same time, the Government of India is trying to solve the problem through talks. But our history shows that nothing can be solved through talks. Yet, we have to support the Government of India's efforts and so, we are taking part in the talks.

But at the same time, the Sri Lankan Government has not, so far, arrived at any worthwhile solution. For example, it is violating the ceasefire and it has not properly implemented it. There should be peace as a prelude to talks (with the Sri Lankan Government). Every day they are killing us.

Q: Supposing, all the Tamil liberation organisations are asked to go out of India, what will you do?

TRAINING BASES

A: All our important training bases are in Sri Lanka. We are here only to expose the political situation there. We are prepared to go back to our country any time. As the Sri Lankan Government accuses us, we do not have any training bases or anything here. All our training bases, recruitment, are all done in our country. These problems can never affect us.

Q: Recently, you went on a tour of Tamil areas of Sri Lanka and you also met your regional commanders. How is the morale of your cadres and what is the situation there?

A: There is only progress (increasing determination). There is no retardation in the struggle. There is a feeling dominant among the people that instead of slowly dying in batches, it is better to fight and die all together.

Our boys.... comrades..... are closer to the people. As a result, they are strong and firm. There cannot be any talk on morale because as long as there is one soldier (in the LTTE), they will fight for our ideal (to achieve Eelam). Till there is a last comrade, we will fight for our independence..... liberation.

Q: Do you think anything will come out of the talks (with the Sri Lankan Government)?

NO FAITH

A: We don't have faith. We know the history of the last 30 years and Jayewardene's history also. Even common people do not have any faith (that anything will come out of the talks). When the Government of India invites us for talks..... it gives us political support.... For its satisfaction, we are participating. But the results are in Jayewardene's hands. I don't have faith that he will put forward something (viable proposals).

Q: What do you think of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's approach and also of

Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari?

A: As far as Rajiv Gandhi's approach is concerned, he thinks he can solve this through peaceful means, viz., talks. Destruction is certain through struggle. He wants to minimise the scale of destruction and is trying to solve the problem. When it is a struggle, it will be long-drawn. Even the refugee problem will be there for the Government of India. So, Rajiv Gandhi wants to solve it through peaceful means. But Jayewardene is falsifying such efforts.

Romesh Bhandari's approach..... He is a representative of the Government of India. On behalf of the Prime Minister, he is trying his level best to solve the problem through peaceful means. But till now, Jayewardene has not implemented even the terms and conditions of the ceasefire. So, Romesh Bhandari has not succeeded even in ceasefire efforts.

Q: What is your assessment of the

Thimpu talks, the proposals offered by the Sri Lankan Government?

A: There cannot be talks till peace prevails. The Thimpu talks made the people hate us. If the Sri Lankan Government is not keen on a peaceful atmosphere, how can you believe that it will implement the proposals offered?

Q: There is a belief that there is not much democracy either in your organisation or other Tamil militant organisations. Is it true?

A: You should ask our organisation's members that question. We have given them so much of freedom. There is no problem like that.

Q: What is your attitude towards the TULF, the PLOT and other ENLF organisations?

A: They are also fighting for liberation like us. □

T.S.S.

Give us diplomatic recognition

Uma Maheswaran

Uma Maheswaran, secretary-general of the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOT), is long seasoned on the Tamil question and his own political experience seems to have touched all shades of political response to the problem. He was in the Federal Party and then in the TULF, until the perception of anti-Tamil brutality turned him to the conviction that militancy was the only answer. He has not looked back since. He broke with the LTTE to co-found PLOT.

In this interview, he reiterates PLOT's distaste for a strategy based solely on hit-and-run attacks and stresses that united military action is the need of the hour. Striking a moderate note, he distances himself from the 'Eelam Only' stand and says the Tamil groups must keep talking.....

FRONTLINE: There seems to be a stalemate now, with no progress evident in the negotiations over the substantive issues and the continuous reports of ceasefire violations. What are the prospects for your struggle and what are the tasks ahead?

Uma Maheswaran: Unity of strategy among the Tamil groups seems to be

the most important task ahead. We need to have united military action but that's possible only on the basis of a political understanding. Right now, the major obstacle to this is the strategy adopted by some of the groups which rely on hit-and-run attacks. This kind of attacks has reached the saturation point and is self-defeating.

Of course, initially hit-and-run attacks were necessary to raise the morale of our people. We were the first to attack police stations; we attacked Anaikottai in 1981. But in today's conditions, when we have the support of the Tamil masses, these are no longer necessary and we now have to work on the Sinhala people and get them to understand our struggle.

Q: Why are these hit-and-run attacks counter-productive?

CHAUVINISTIC

A: Look, we're fighting a chauvinistic government and the army doesn't belong to the Tamilians; it is 99 per cent Sinhalese, so if you go and attack some place and then run away, the army will come and massacre the whole village.

Q: So the Tamil civilians end up bearing the brunt of the military's response to the militants' attacks?

A: Yes, we are not in a position to sa-

feguard them, particularly in our area. We are losing our bases in Tamil Eelam..... Vavuniya, Mannar, Mullaitivu, Trincomalee..... because of this type of attack which drives the Tamil people out as the army moves into the borderline areas. The Tamil organisations seem to have gone to the maximum, attacking police stations and so on. They have now been diverted to attacking civilians, they are using their cadre to attack civilians and rob temples.....

Q: What then should be the military strategy?

PEOPLE'S ARMY

A: Well, we believe that we must prepare a people's army which must teach the people defensive action, how to act in a struggle, how to deal with the enemy..... Our army goes to the villages, educates them politically, how to cut trenches, how to take cover from explosives. We must know how to safeguard our people. A situation is developing in Sri Lanka very similar to Beirut where the people are exposed to attacks from the air. So like in Beirut, our people must know how to get into their prepared trenches and to move into a defensive position.

Q: Your military action would be essentially defensive then.....

A: Yes, because we are not fully prepared. Unless we have the power to protect an area, we should not go and attack. Although we do use our capacity to attack to defend our people. For example, last May we attacked the Nikeweratiya police station in the Colombo area and that was to divert the army from its concentration on Jaffna and Batticaloa.

MOBILISING PEOPLE

We are also mobilising the people throughout the area, organising networks through trade unions. We are organising plantation workers; in fact they will be the vanguard of our struggle. But we are also organising the progressive elements among the Sinhala people through our Voice of Tamil Eelam broadcasts. You see, the Sinhala people were kept in the dark, politicians have fed them with communal propaganda, painting the Tamils as the enemy. For the last so many years, the Sinhala working class has been deprived of its rights, unable to mobilise trade unions.

The Government is trying to build a capitalist set-up but the working class is diverted from fighting this capitalist set-up by the threat of a communal problem with the Tamils. Every time they are told: "The Tamils are going to attack, they are going to destroy the

whole country, India is going to invade....."

That's why we must explain to the Sinhala masses who we are, why we are fighting and that is why we prefer to describe our struggle as an anti-imperialist one rather than an ethnic one..... it prevents a divide between us and the Sinhala people. We are asking for India's help in the context of the anti-imperialist struggle, not merely because of ethnic ties.

Q: India's "good offices" seem to be making little headway in breaking the impasse. Do you think India's policy has changed over these months?

A: Well, G. Parthasarathy was there and he certainly did try his best for us



By special arrangement

but finally President Jayewardene didn't want him because he is a Tamil. Then after that, Bhandari has also negotiated but so far no positive results seem to have emerged..... also Jayewardene is not listening. He is not in a position to solve anything. His party cadre and the Opposition parties don't want it to be solved. Actually, Jayewardene is himself a chauvinist; remember, it was he who, way back in 1958, marched with the Buddhist monks from Colombo to Kandy demanding that the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact which promised some autonomy to our people be abrogated.

Q: Could India do anything more at this stage?

SHOULD APPLY PRESSURE

A: It should pressure the Sri Lankan Government to observe the ceasefire. I told Bhandari last time that unless there is a military balance brought in, we can't solve this problem. We are not asking

for military intervention but we do want India to help us internationally like it helps the PLO or the SWAPO or the ANC. Give us diplomatic recognition and help us with arms.

Q: When you say the military balance must be restored, do you mean—help you gain parity with the Sri Lankan Army?

LIMITATION

A: Yes, military balance is important. You see, we have been made use of repeatedly by the Sri Lankan Government and finally ditched. This is because they know we are very weak. We can only agitate or sit and fast. They know that is the maximum we can do and that at any time they can suppress us. So if we have the power.....

Q: One problem in the negotiations seems to be the perception that the Tamil groups are not willing to come forward with alternative proposals. After you have rejected the working paper, can you not offer counter-proposals?

A: Once we go for the talks, it means that we are ready to consider the next step. There's no point in going to the table and shouting that we don't want to come down from the idea of a separate State of Eelam. We are ready to offer counter-proposals but that can only be if the Sri Lankan Government shows some interest. We believe that the Government is making use of the talks to buy time to build their Army, and to bring in modern weapons. They are attacking our people and driving them out of our areas. If they are really interested, all this must stop.

Q: Have you worked at an alternative framework?

ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK

A: We have studied the two frameworks of Annexure C and the CWC proposals. Our thinking is based on a combination of these two. But we want to add something for the plantation Tamils and the Muslims living outside the Northern and the Eastern provinces. We have suggested for them, a canton-type system. But we will not submit these proposals until the ceasefire is really observed.

Q: Is the demand for merger of the North and the East non-negotiable?

A: If we agree to two separate provincial councils in the North and the East, within a year we will lose the Eastern province. Its demographic pattern has already been altered by State-sponsored colonisation and there is no way to stop further colonisation. Decolonisation is obviously impossible. So merger is the only way out..... □