

Sri Lanka: Tigers' trauma

"India is riding the wrong horse", says Dr A S Balasingham, theoretician of the Liberation Tigers, about the tacit support India has given to Tamil United Liberation Front leader Amirthalingam. The right-hand man of Tiger leader Prabhakaran believes there is no alternative to armed struggle for the Eelam. Amirthalingam, he says, has no place in the Tamil state envisaged.

THERE appears to be two battles going on in the strife-torn Sri Lanka. The more publicised one is the ethnic struggle between the Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. The other battle is within the Tamil Tigers who are clawing at one another. The various Tamil guerilla groups are fighting an intense power war for the leadership of the Tamil Liberation United Front.

The position of Appapillai Amirthalingam, president of the TULF, is being challenged by these underground groups, claiming to subscribe to socialist ideologies. The tactics for capturing the leadership is annihilation and the hatred they have for one another is as strong as the common hatred for the Sinhalese and the army.

The various groups nevertheless express their desire to unite under one guerilla organisation to fight it out with the Jayewardene government and wrench the Eelam state but their prescriptions for unity are rather vague. Perhaps, the only thing that the two major groups—Prabhakaran's Liberation Tigers and Uma Maheswaran's People's Liberation Organisation of Tamils (PLOT)—agree on is that they do not believe in sharing the conference table with the Sinhala president. They also do not recognise Amirthalingam as the Tamils' representative.

Opposition to Amirthalingam is not something sudden. It has been brewing among the Lankan Tamils over the years and young people especially have time and again questioned his soft-line attitude towards the Jayewardene government. The Tigers had given a call for boycotting the recent civic elections but the TULF contested it against popular sentiments. The elections saw a meagre two per cent polling in Jaffna district against the usual 80 per cent turnout and some of the election meetings of Amirthalingam were disturbed by angry Tamil youths suspecting him of colluding with Jayewardene just to cling on to his position as the leader of opposition in the Lankan parliament.

But still a good part of the elders among the Tamil population were with Amirthalingam and the TULF, hoping

that some day the Eelam would be delivered off his able hands. Now, reports coming from Jaffna and post-riots Colombo speak of a mass shift towards the guerilla philosophy and of parents, disappointed with the TULF's performance and disgusted with the Sinhalese carnage on their lives and property, initiating their children to the Tiger movement.

This new situation is as bad to Amirthalingam's future on the island as it is to the designs of the Sinhalese president to continue his dominance over the minority Tamils. However, efforts are being made to unify all the Tamil youth forces under one banner so that they do not "work at cross purposes" as Amirthalingam put it.

PLOT general secretary Uma Maheswaran recently told this correspondent that there was urgent need for unity but ideological differences were in the way of success. On his part, he said, he was willing to extend a friendly hand to Prabhakaran, the Tiger leader, in a common



Masterminding 'hits'. Prabhakaran (left) with one of his men.

fight against the Sinhala government. He would soon leave for Sri Lanka to mobilise his own boys and also to examine ways of bringing the groups together.

Prabhakaran is now in Jaffna planning and executing 'hits' against the government forces. In fact, the July 23 ambush of 13 Sinhala soldiers in Jaffna, which is said to have triggered off the anti-Tamil riots on the island, was the handiwork of Prabhakaran's Tigers.

However, the political spokesman and theoretician of the Tiger movement, A S Balasingham, firmly denied that the ambush was the cause of the riots. The attack on Tamils had been pre-planned by the hawks in the Jayewardene government and the ambush just gave them an excuse to put their diabolical plan into action. There were attacks on the Tamils in Trincomalee "weeks before our Jaffna operation".

"We had blasted the Chavakachcheri police station, killing several policemen and forcing the government to close down many police stations in the north. This had not triggered off any racial violence then. So why now? It is all a well-orchestrated plan by the Sinhalese government," said the 45-year-old sturdy looking Batticaloa social scientist, now settled in London with his British wife.

Balasingham said the recent holocaust was part of a plan by the government ("they first blamed the Tigers and now are blaming the left movement for the riots") aimed at a genocide. The first phase of the plan was "subtle extermination of the Tamil culture, language, religion and geographical advantages by destroying the very foundations of their own identity and the second, physical extermination of the Tamils.

The disenfranchisement of the plantation Tamils, the 'Sinhala only' Act, standardisation in education, aggressive colonisation of Tamil areas, destruction of the Tamil library with its thousands of precious old books, burning down of the only regional newspaper in Jaffna called *Eelanadu* and the destruction of the Hindu temples were orchestrated, Balasingham said.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil

Eelam have now decided that enough is enough and have launched a massive drive of recruitment, training and equipping its cadre for a decisive attack on the 'enemy' to get the Tamil state, he said.

But then, in the present situation he found it regrettable that the TULF was being projected in India and elsewhere as the sole guardian of the Lankan Tamil interests. The Tigers are also in touch with some of the world leaders to convince them that they have enough strike power to win their land as well as brain-power to take charge of administration when Eelam is born. The "boys" have started coming down from the various world centres and Lankan Tamil businessmen and others employed abroad have promised the movement that they would help build a powerful and wealthy nation of Eelam.

To India, Balasingham said, the struggle for Eelam was of special significance as Lanka is 'surrounded by US imperialists whose object was to somehow destabilise the sub-continent and nuclearise the Indian Ocean. They have already got some land for the Voice of America in Trincomalee and are trying to set up a naval base.

"Now, Trinco is the card Jayewardene is holding as threat in the event of Indian intervention. He is facing deep economic crisis and the recent holocaust has further damaged the economy. With serious destabilisation of the island's political structure by military indiscipline, the president has approached the USA and UK for help.

"Our information is that aid will come from Japan on instructions from the Americans. That is why JR's brother has gone to Japan. The military hardware could come from South Korea and even Malaysia and Singapore. So, while Japan could send him the money, the arms could come from South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia. The Americans would remain in the shadow and not reveal their role in all this but they cannot fool the world.

"Thus the Indian government's reaction to the situation is quite vital to both the countries. But from what is happening now, the Indian government is bound to get a jolt from its diplomatic exercises to get some kind of concessions for the Tamils from the fascist JR regime. The Indian government is going to be deeply disappointed as the Lankans are not going to oblige. They are only interested in destroying our island.

Balasingham believes negotiations would not work. "Even if some agreements evolve, they will be rejected outright by us. It is we who matter and Amirthalingam is no longer our representative. He has lost our trust, as he has all along been behaving as some kind of

safety valve for the JR government in its dubious dealings with the Tamils."

A xerox copy of the political manifesto of the TULF for the 1977 elections reads: "The Tamil-speaking representatives who get elected through these votes, while being members of the national state assembly of Ceylon, will also form themselves into the 'national assembly of Tamil Eelam' which will draft a constitution for the state of Tamil Eelam and to establish the independence of the Tamil Eelam by bringing that constitution into operation either by peaceful means or by direct action or struggle."

But Balasingham said, Amirthalingam had done nothing in pursuance of the manifesto. His MPs had gone to Russia and Cuba and such other countries only to project their own leader and not really to fight for the Eelam. "In fact, Amirthalingam is a stumbling block to our movement. He has been misrepresenting to outside world that the Tigers are just a bunch of misguided boys. But now we are not worried, for, we are the most powerful group in the Eelam and we have a wide international network. Ours is a theoretically well-entrenched movement, with contacts with socialist groups in Europe and all over. This is a military operation. The fight for Eelam will be ultimately by bullets and not by words across a table. For this we are fast raising a national liberation army and we need Indian help.

"But right now the Indian government is riding on the wrong horse. It has committed a serious diplomatic blunder.



Led the July 23 ambush. Chelavanayagam

But we are confident India will realise the mistake. We are in touch with the authorities concerned. Besides, the Indian government has its own sources of information, correct information.

Balasingham is the right hand man of Prabhakaran. He thundered: "Amirthalingam cannot cheat the Tamils all the time. The youth want a socialist pattern while he represents a bourgeoisie generation. He is busy helping only the upper middle class Tamils in Colombo who fund him. But the poor oppressed people are behind us."

He claimed that the plantation workers are getting disillusioned with Thondaman, minister in the JR cabinet and a friend of Amirthalingam. "Thondaman has put forth a stupid idea of resigning and bringing from Lanka all his people to India. Why can't he organise a week's strike which is sure to break the much-strained Sri Lankan economy?"

With the failure of talks with the Sri Lankan government, Balasingham said, the only option open to Amirthalingam is to go underground. But he could go underground "only in Tamil Nadu, for, he has no place in the Tamil Eelam."

The Tigers faded into the background during the current negotiations because they did not want to disturb the talks. "We know they will fail and that is what has happened. We wanted to wait and let India and world know this is a fascist regime with no respect for human rights and international law."

Balasingham then introduced to this correspondent a Tiger who just then had arrived from Italy. The flow of the 'boys' from the various world centres, he said, was increasing and very soon there would be enough hardcore Tigers to launch a decisive offensive.

"The Sinhala army is weak and forever in a state of terror. They cannot sustain an effective assault. The army is mostly Lankan and not committed unlike our boys. Once the army is driven away from our land, we will declare a provisional revolutionary government of Tamil Eelam and seek recognition from third world countries, particularly India. We are preparing the grounds for this politically, militarily and diplomatically on an international level."

Balasingham said Eelam would have a neutral policy, without any leaning to external powers. "We will be an anti-imperial force and friendly to India, respecting the global policies of India, particularly peace in the Indian Ocean. And our's will be a unique socialist state with maximum freedom for the people, based on the experiences of other socialist countries."

—BHAGWAN R SINGH