

Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO)

(sethu)This organisation was formally founded in 1979 though it was in existence since 1968 as an unstructured organisation. TELO has its origins in the Thangadorai group under the leadership of Thangadorai and Kuttimani. In one of their major acts, on March. 25, 1981, the TELO committed robbery by ambushing a "Peoples Bank" van which was returning to Jaffna town with the day's collection. An amount of Rs. 78 lakh rupees was taken and several policemen killed in this hit was masterminded by Kuttimani.

Prime Minister's advisors were working overtime, giving facilities to the militants, particularly the TELO (Tamil Ealam Liberation Organisation) to be trained in the use of modern arms in the camps organised in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, New Delhi and elsewhere. The idea was that after the training, they would be supplied with arms and sent to Northern Sri Lanka to engage the Sri Lankan troops in guerrilla action. It was supposed to be a top secret operation without even the knowledge of the State Government and its Intelligence agency.

On April 5, 1981, Kuttimani, Thangadurai and Sellathurai Sivasubramaniam alias Thevan were arrested at Mannalkadal, near Point Pedro, while trying to escape in a boat to India. After the arrest of Thangadorai and Kuttimani, Sri Sabaratnam took over the TELO leadership. The three important TELO leaders Thangadurai, Kuttimani and Jegan were killed in a prison massacre in Wellawatte in 1983 while they were incarcerated there. After the death of these leaders, TELO could never regroup and in the ensuing internecine skirmishes, the LTTE virtually liquidated this organisation by the middle of eighties.

On 27.07.83 there was a massacre allegedly by Sri Lankan security forces in the prison at Wellikade where 54 Tamil Youths alongwith Tamil militant leaders Kuttimani and Thangadurai of TELO were done to death allegedly by the Sri Lankan Army. After their deaths Sabaratnam took over leadership of TELO. But there were major internal conflicts between him and members of the organisation.

On 27.2.84, BOBBY and three other TELO members were found in possession of 11.774 Kgs of gold suspected to have been looted from the Peoples Bank at Jaffna. They were caught in India.

On 09.06.1984, Rajan and few others of TELO resorted to an indefinite fast near Gandhi statue in Madras, protesting against the opprobrious attitude of their leader Sri Sabaratnam.

TELO leaders confined three dissident cadres of their organisation, two of whom later escaped and sought shelter in the room of one Dhayaparan, a Sri Lankan Tamil student in the Madras Medical College hostel.

Sri Sabaratnam, TELO leader, sent his boys to intimidate dissidents at Mahalingapuram and Arcot Road in Madras. Sudha, the political head of the breakaway group, organised "Martyrs' Day", independent of TELO. A few boys of Sri Sabaratnam joined Sudha, and TELO planned to settle scores with them in Jaffna.

On 5.5.86 the TELO leader Sabartnam was killed by the LTTE, in Sri Lanka.

Military training given to TELO by the RAW in India: Five camps organised by Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) were reported to be running in the districts of Ramnad (3 camps) and Salem (2 camps). There were totally 233 male cadres undergoing this training which comprised Physical Training, Arms training, swimming and boat driving.



TELO LEADER AND MP

Deploying a Sinhala army in large areas after evicting Tamils from their towns and villages is another form of ethnic cleansing. An army occupying the homes and lands of our people cannot call itself their guardian. Only a foreign army will drive out people and occupy their towns and villages. I therefore consider the army occupying our lands as a foreign army," said Mr. Selvam Adaikalanathan Tamil National Alliance MP for Vanni, sources said.

Mr. Adaikalanathan said the above while speaking Friday during the debate in Sri Lankas Parliament on the peace talks between Colombo and the Liberation Tigers, held in Oslo in December last year.

The funds granted by donor countries in support of the peace process should be fully utilised in the northeast and not in the other parts of the country as demanded by some politicians. Their demand is totally unacceptable because the underdevelopment of the south is due to government negligence whereas in the northeast town and villages were destroyed by the state. Therefore I appeal to donor nations to their channel funds in support of the peace process only to the northeast, he said.

Speaking to the Tamilnet following the debate, the MP explained: If the south is not developed it is not due to any discriminatory practice based on religion, region, caste etc.,

But the destruction in the northeast was caused by deliberate and discriminatory practice coupled with the relentless prosecution of war by the state. For the Sri Lankan state security means the eviction of Tamils from their villages and towns. If security means anything else to the Sri Lankan state it wont perceive the presence of the Tamil public as a threat to its security installations in the northeast.

Foreign governments who support the peace process should be aware of this dimension.

This must be understood in the context of the ethnic composition of the Sri Lankan security forces. They are 99 percent Sinhala and majority Buddhist. In theory if the army is Tamil, they will be among the people and there wont be high security zones, Mr. Adaikalanathan said.

Some questions in Tamil Nadu

While the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's stand on the Sri Lankan Tamil issue is marked by ambivalence, two of its major partners in the National Democratic Alliance express open support to the LTTE and its demand for Eelam.

ASHA KRISHNAKUMAR

THE Sri Lankan Tamil issue, which had a major, emotional impact on Tamil Nadu in the early 1980s, continues to cast its shadow over the State's politics. So much so that no party, however limited its political presence and ambitions, can afford not to take a stand on the emotive issue of "Eelam."



S. THANTHONI

Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi.

From 1983, when ethnic strife broke out in Sri Lanka, to Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in May 1991, every Sri Lankan Tamil group enjoyed the backing of one major political party or the other in the State. (The Tamil militants were even provided military training during the 1980s.) The Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) under Sri Sabaratnam had the patronage of M. Karunanidhi, the leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), while Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) leaders were supported by Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran of the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). But the LTTE, ruthlessly liquidated its political rivals, starting with Sri Sabaratnam in 1984, and arrogated to itself the role of sole champion of the Sri Lankan Tamil cause. Tamil Nadu, besides being a sanctuary, offered the LTTE financial and material support. The LTTE painstakingly created a clandestine network of smugglers, fishermen, political activists, transport operators, businessmen and officials. This network proved especially useful to the Tigers after it was proscribed.

The heinous act of killing Rajiv Gandhi and the revulsion it caused among the people dramatically changed the major political parties' perception of the LTTE and also the larger question of resolving the ethnic crisis. Most parties rejected the extreme, terrorist approach of the LTTE and favoured a solution within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. A few who believed that a separate Tamil homeland was the only solution maintained a tactical silence in view of the ban on the group and the overwhelming public opinion against it. But pro-LTTE groups became active in Tamil Nadu once again after the Supreme Court confirmed the death sentence against four of the accused in the Rajiv assassination case in November 1999. Under the guise of rallying against the death penalty, these chauvinist elements tried to neutralise the revulsion towards the LTTE and "revive sympathy for it by portraying the assassins as heroes," as pointed out by the CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Prakash Karat (*Frontline*, January 21, 2000). Now, with the LTTE's string of victories since November 1999, the supporters of Tamil Eelam, mostly belonging to chauvinistic parties such as the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and a few fringe groups, have expressed open support to the militant outfit's demand for Eelam.

While most parties agree with the Centre's "continued commitment to a negotiated peaceful resolution of the conflict, within the framework of Sri Lanka's unity and territorial integrity," the statements of Chief Minister Karunanidhi have been ambivalent, perhaps dictated by considerations such as the Assembly elections due next year, the possible mood swing of the people after the recent LTTE victories and, most important, the reaction of AIADMK supremo Jayalalitha.

On May 4, Karunanidhi told the State Assembly that "it is the unanimous opinion of the people of Tamil Nadu that India should neither send its troops nor supply arms to help the Sri Lankan Government... India should not lend itself to the massacre of Tamils in Sri Lanka." On May 12, he said: "We (the DMK) will be happy if they (the LTTE) get Tamil Eelam, either through negotiations or through armed conflict." He assured the House at



the same time that the State would not be allowed to be used as a base by the LTTE. On May 13, he did a *volte face*. He explained that he did not support the establishment of an independent Eelam and that what he meant was that he would be happy to see an end to the Sri Lankan conflict and the creation of conditions in which Tamils could live peacefully. Then on May 15, he elaborated on how the DMK "distanced itself" from the LTTE many years ago, and that just because the DMK had at one time supported "Tamil Eelam" it should not be construed that "we supported all the activities of the LTTE". According to party sources, the DMK's support to the LTTE could at best be "moral".

In keeping with the line of distancing himself from the LTTE, Karunanidhi ordered a crackdown on pro-LTTE organisations; 10 persons were arrested in Chennai for putting up posters celebrating the LTTE's victories. The government also arrested Tamil National Movement (TNM) leader P. Nedumaran and 250 others on May 7 in Chidambaram when they tried to take out a procession and hold a meeting in support of the LTTE and "Tamil Eelam". The Tamil Nadu government maintained that it had given the Centre a free hand and to take whatever action it thought fit in relation to Sri Lanka.

But the other constituents of the NDA from Tamil Nadu, the MDMK and the PMK, have consistently articulated their support for "Tamil Eelam" and the LTTE. MDMK chief Vaiko and PMK founder Dr.S. Ramadoss are against any form of support to the Sri Lankan government and favour the lifting of the ban on the LTTE.

It is significant that in the proceedings before the Special Court that tried the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, Vaiko was declared a 'hostile witness' when he denied in court the statements he had allegedly made to an Inspector of Police in the course of the investigation.

On the extension of the ban on the LTTE (which expired on May 14) for an indefinite period, PMK president G.K. Mani said that the party's "moral support" for "Tamil Eelam" would continue. "We are looking forward to the blooming of Eelam," he said. Said Vaiko: "Although the party favoured lifting of the ban, it would support the views of the NDA government on the issue."

K. GAJENDRAN

Dr. S. Ramadoss, the PMK chief.

Other fringe groups put up posters and organised conferences in different parts of the State to celebrate the LTTE's victory until the government banned the TNM meeting in Chidambaram.

Although Jayalalitha has been largely silent on developments in Sri Lanka, she articulated her party's position on the Tamil issue on May 6. She said: "The fighting and killing should be brought to an end. The Tamil population must be given their legitimate rights and peace must be brought to the island. This can be achieved only through a political solution. The Indian government can offer its good offices in bringing about such a solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka." She added: "I was personally

responsible for bringing about the ban on the LTTE. Our stand remains unchanged." She was for providing humanitarian aid to Sri Lanka, but through the Red Cross.

Welcoming India's "clear stance" that ruled out recognition of "Tamil Eelam," Tamil Maanila Congress president G.K. Moopanar said that the Centre was on the "right path". "If the LTTE is safeguarding the interests of Tamils there, why is there an increase in the refugee inflow to India (when the LTTE captured the Elephant Pass)?" he asked. Moopanar, however, advised the Centre to be "cautious" while delineating its position on the Sri Lankan Tamil issue.

CPI(M) Polit Bureau member R. Umanath, reiterating the party's consistent stand on the issue, said: "The best solution to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka would be to provide autonomy to the Tamils within a united Sri Lanka." He further said: "A separate 'Tamil Eelam' is not an answer to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka." He wanted India to extend humanitarian aid and even sell arms to Sri Lanka Army. When Pakistan and China supply arms to Sri Lanka, there was nothing wrong if India did so, he observed.

Fighting in Jaffna is expected to trigger an exodus of people to Tamil Nadu and the DMK State Government has geared itself to meet this challenge. In fact, soon after the fall of Elephant Pass on April 22, the government received intelligence that about 3,000 Tamils were ready to cross over to India. Initially, the influx was not as heavy as feared. Up to May 9, only 39 refugees landed at Arichamunai on the Indian coast, about 60 km from the Mandapam camp. Before being taken to the transit camp they were screened for weapons and enquiries were made to find out whether they had links with militants. There was a decline in the inflow after that (see separate story). On May 21, the influx resumed, with the landing of 72 more refugees, including 32 women and 14 children, at Arichamunai.