

Political patronage for tigers in Tamilnadu. (1995, September 03). The Island.

POLITICAL PATRONAGE FOR TIGERS IN TAMILNADU

The recent escape of 43 hard-core elements of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from the special camp at the Vellore Fort has not only exposed the serious administrative lapses but provoked a fresh bout of debate about the political patronage the militants are enjoying in Tamil Nadu.

Ninth in a series since 1992 involving only the LTTE cadre, the latest getaway has enabled 30 men and women of the highly treacherous group to be on the prowl, and that has rendered not only Tamil Nadu but the entire nation vulnerable to a great risk. There is also apprehension that these daredevils might attempt to storm the high security Poonamallee sub-jail to free their comrades accused in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

Ever since the ethnic crisis broke out in Sri Lanka in 1983, Tamil Nadu has been in the grip of a new phenomenon of violence and a fast-spreading bomb culture, increasing incidence of crime and smuggling.

The segregated militant groups like the LTTE, EPRLF, Eelam People's Liberation Organisation (EPLAO) lodged in separate special camps, as also the 60,000 hapless Tamil refugees from across the Palk Straits, have apparently lost the sym-

patronage links with and supporting the LTTE for selfish reasons, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, is charging the Centre with playing politics on a sensitive issue and not cooperating with her in her determined efforts to stamp out the menacing forces.

The Opposition parties in Tamil Nadu, particularly the Congress (I) and the DMK, join Ms. Jayalalitha's

she or her lieutenant have been quick to come out charging the Congress (I) and the Central intelligence agencies with conspiring to discredit and destabilise her Government.

The political shuttcock apart, the top-level bureaucracy dismisses as meaningless and absurd the allegation that Ms. Jayalalitha has an understanding with the LTTE. It has little to suspect the Chief Minister's commitment to drive out the

national escape of LTTE militants from Vellore. Ms. Jayalalitha spoke of gaps in the personal involvement of superior officers in camp security and how detailed instructions and pointed intelligence reports failed to sensitise the officers and men.

Rampant corruption, feck and connivance not only among police and revenue personnel and fisherman in the coastal areas but also in the Customs and coastal security, which are too well-known to dilate upon, have contributed enormously to the weakening of the vigil against escapes and unauthorised intrusions into the State. Smuggling activities go on unabated at the militants, for whom money is no constraint at all, pay unimagably high prices for supplies of fuel, food and medicines.

While one could see that the LTTE activities have come down steeply from what it was before Ms. Jayalalitha came to power in 1991, officials do concede that the Tiger's support base in Tamil Nadu is increasing in recent months, an ominous development which should cause real concern to the Government.

The 120 refugee camps located in different parts of the State serve as major communication and contact points for the militants who are also pampered by certain political parties. Tamil chauvinist groups besides a few

in the guise of lawyers, reference to their theory of collision between Ms. Jayalalitha and the militants. Many of these elements said to be in the payroll of the LTTE blindly support the

stopping of electoral alliances between the AIADMK and the Congress (I), the Centre is using every opportunity to embarrass the State Government on the LTTE issue.

Despite being generous in the last three years in giving assurances of all help to contain the militants, actually the Centre has stopped with a Rs. 10 crore aid package as against the request for an assistance of Rs.80 crores to modernise the police force to match the

sophisticated weapons of the militants. It is also hesitant to arm the State Government with powers to treat the militants as prisoners and subject them to the ordinary prison laws to effectively curb their illegal activities on the Indian soil.

The pithy is unlike her mentor, MGR, Ms. Jayalalitha is not in rapport with the Centre so as to get her own way, nor are there senior Ministers from Tamil Nadu in the Union Govern-

ment in a position to adequately present the State's case for securing assistance. The Opposition parties, including the Congress (I), appear more keen on finding fault with the State Government than helping it tackle problems.

The game of one-upmanship is not going to throw up solutions. The DMK president and former Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, feels that there is little justification any more

for confining the militants to special camps. In his view, a way out can be found if only the Chief Minister can sit with the Prime Minister to discuss all the ramifications of the LTTE issue. The attempt should be not to suppress the militants lodged in special camps but to store them to their original habitat at the earliest.

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in Madras
(Courtesy 'Hindu')

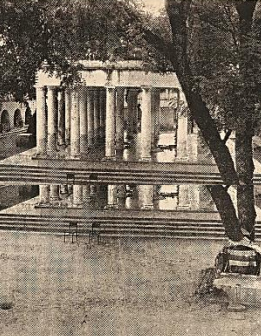
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Rampant corruption, fear and connivance among officials have contributed to the weakening of the vigil against escapes in Tamil Nadu



The entry of the tunnel which the militants dug to get away... gaping holes in security.

bitter critic and Janata Party president, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, in dubbing her as a stooge of the LTTE. They could not deny the fact that soon after taking the reins, she went all out to smash the LTTE communication network, transport system and armaments supply and applied intense pressure on the militants even with only limited resources and outdated equipment. It was largely due to her insistence that the Centre imposed a ban on the LTTE. She has been saying that the drive against the militants will go on without any let-up and uninhibited by the fact that she faces the greatest danger from the dreaded killer group.



The Tipu Mahal in the courtyard of the special camp in the Vellore Fort where the LTTE militants used to relax... were the doors really locked?

thy of the common man in Tamil Nadu. The most detested is the LTTE and that is best illustrated by the fact that whenever a crime takes place anywhere in the State, the immediate popular suspicion is the "hand" of the LTTE.

Most of these militants are not involved in any legal case, but because of their propensity to indulge in criminal activity, they are separated from other refugees and lodged in special camps. The State Government would be glad to pack them off as the militants themselves demand; if they are kept here at great risk, it is only because the Centre has directed it to be so. Their status, neither as refugees nor as prisoners, is precisely the problem for the administration.

Even as she is being accused of maintaining se-

Tamil Nadu in return for an assurance against any threat to her life.

Ms. Jayalalitha's detractors point to the absence of adequate follow-up in the cases concerning jailbreaks and the fleeing of LTTE men from police custody. Her being friendly with some of the organisations and individuals who are openly espousing the cause of the banned LTTE is also cited as proof of her being soft to the Tigers. In their view, the inquiry commissions are an eyewash and the suspension of a few policemen after every escape was only to hide her "secret understanding" with the LTTE and make scapegoats of others.

Ms. Jayalalitha, too, is not found wanting when it comes to making wild charges against others. Whenever an escape, highway robbery or any such crime took place in the past,

Those who are alleging collusion between Ms. Jayalalitha and the LTTE could not deny the fact that soon after taking the reins, she went all out to smash the LTTE communication network, transport system and armaments supply and applied intense pressure on the militants even with only limited resources and outdated equipment. It was largely due to her insistence that the Centre imposed a ban on the LTTE. She has been saying that the drive against the militants will go on without any let-up and uninhibited by the fact that she faces the greatest danger from the dreaded killer group.

The ground reality, however, is that the administrative machinery is hardly equipped to meet the challenge. Even at the latest conference of Collectors and police officers on August 23, referring to the sensa-