

Mayanayakas welcome in Jaffna-LTTE. (1993, November 07) The Sunday times.

Mahanayakas welcome in Jaffna - LTTE

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The LTTE has accused the D.B. Wijetunga Government of closing all roads to peace in the North-East conflict and of planning an all out war to win Sinhala votes at elections.

Anton Balasingham and Tamil Selvam, spokesmen for the LTTE made the charges in an interview with us during one of the high points of our mission to Jaffna recently.

Dr. Balasingham whom we interviewed in Jaffna said President Wijetunga was now saying there was no ethnic problem and therefore the LTTE saw no purpose in having talks.

The LTTE theoretician reiterated the LTTE's claim that it was not associated with the killings of DUNF leader Lalith Athulathmudali or President Premadasa this year.

Political Wing leader Tamil Selvam warned that if the Government and the Army carried out the threat to launch an all out war in January, it was the civilians who would suffer the most, while the Government won votes and the Army Commander kept his job.

Excerpts from the interview:

Q: The Eelam war has been raging for the past ten years. How long can the LTTE go on fighting?

A: The LTTE is determined to carry on this struggle until it achieves all its political objectives and liberation for hundreds of thousands of suffering Tamil people.

The LTTE has the courage and the strength to continue this struggle for days, months and years.

Q: It is said the LTTE controls only the northern areas while the east is under the control of the armed forces. Do you think you can continue the LTTE administration in the north?

A: LTTE has a long history behind its armed struggle.

We have not only fought the Sri Lankan army but also the Indian army, one of the largest in the world. Our war against the IPKF went on for two years. When we look at these facts, it is clear that neither the Sri Lankan army nor the IPKF could defeat us militarily.

One may think our military success is due to the dedication and determination of our members. But more than that, it is the people and their cooperation that are instrumental in our military victories.

This is where the government has gone wrong. It has been misinformed that the people in the north and east do not support the LTTE's cause. The history of internal military conflicts shows governments have failed when people are with the rebels. We will continue our struggle as long as people are with us. The armed forces may hold on to a few places in the north for sometime. The question is not whether the LTTE could hold on or not but it is whether the government could carry on this battle.

The government has to spend thousands of millions of rupees for defence purposes. If it goes on spending such large sums on defence, we doubt the government could carry on this war for another 10 years. We do not have heavy defence expenditure. We do not have to pay salaries to our cadres. They are all volunteers. We do not pay compensation for dead or injured soldiers unlike the government.

We take the government's weapons and fight against it. Therefore we don't have to spend much on purchase of weapons.

Q: The Parliamentary Select Committee on the ethnic conflict is preparing its final document. Do you think, the Select Committee would provide a basis for a solution?

A: The LTTE is of the view that the Parliamentary Select Committee cannot find a solution to this problem.

There are so many contributory factors which had made the LTTE to hold this view. First, the two main political parties have not submitted their proposals.

Secondly, the Select Committee has rejected the idea of a merged North-East province. Even the Colombo-based Tamil parties and for that matter Tamil people in the South have no faith in the Select Committee.

One of the biggest mistakes, the Select Committee is making is trying to find a solution without the participation of the LTTE in deliberations. The entire world knows that no solution can be found without the LTTE cooperation.

For instance, let's say the Select Committee has come out with a solution and the government now wants to hold elections in the North and East. If the LTTE oppose the government move, how can the government hold elections? Therefore the LTTE cannot accept any outcome of the Select Committee.

Q: If the LTTE is claiming to represent the Tamil people of this country, why hasn't it put forward a formula to resolve the ethnic problem?

A: The Tamils' fight for rights did not begin yesterday. From 1948 we have been seeking a just solution to Tamil grievances and have suggested several formulas. To name a few, the B-C pact, and the Bangalore rounds of talks.

The LTTE, too put forward several plans in which it had spelt out the concepts of the Tamil speaking people including the Muslims of the area, the right to land and their national identity. I would like to know what the Sinhala parties have put forward. Our leader Velupillai Prabhakaran also agreed to a Federal system with the north and east merged. But not a single Sinhala party took that offer seriously. So one cannot say we have not put forward any plans.

Q: After the break-down of talks with the LTTE, the government said it would resume talks only if Mr. Prabhakaran came for negotiations. How did the LTTE leader view this invitation?

A: As soon as President Wijetunga assumed office, he said he would like to talk to Mr. Prabhakaran and the problem should be settled through negotiations. Now all of a sudden, he has changed his stand and has been saying it is a terrorist problem and not an ethnic one. So how can the LTTE respond to government offers? I would say that the UNP government has closed all the roads to peace. If the President says there is no ethnic problem, then why should we talk?

Q: Why did the LTTE then welcome a proposed visit by Mahanayakas to Jaffna in a bid to find a political solution to this problem?

A: The Christian Priests come here to assess the

situation and talk to us. But their views do not carry much weight in the South, where Mahanayakas are so influential. So we wanted to meet the Mahanayakas so that they could be told of the situation in the North and the message could be conveyed to the people of the South.

Q: The police and government intelligence say the LTTE was responsible for the killings of President Premadasa and DUNF leader Lalith Athulathmudali. What would you say?

A: The LTTE issued a statement dissociating itself from the two assassinations. We do not want to comment further as investigations are still continuing.

Q: LTTE deputy leader Mahattaya's conspicuous absence has given rise to speculation that the movement has been split into two. What is the real situation?

A: There is nothing like that. These are mere rumours.

Q: Is there a policy in the LTTE to change the deputy leader whenever it wants?

A: We have a leader and a central committee for decision making. Once there was a need to organise politically. So we formed a political party and wanted to contest the provincial council elections. We appointed Mahattaya as leader of our political party. After the talks with the government broke down, and the war started again, we saw there was no need for a political party. Hence the dissolution of it and Mahattaya's loss of party leadership.

However, we have a political wing. This is not a political party. We also do not believe that it would be possible for the government to hold elections.

Q: The LTTE has started a recruitment drive for what it describes as a decisive war saying the army is planning an incursion into the peninsula in January. What do you say?

A: (By Tamil Selvam, LTTE's political wing leader): Army Commander Cecil Waidyaratne has publicly said the army would enter Jaffna shortly. Therefore we are preparing for it. And we can face any military incursion. But what we fear would happen is the loss of civilian lives. If the government launches an all out war, it may win Sinhala votes and the Army Commander could safeguard his post for another year. But remember there is the LTTE and there is always an ethnic problem.