

# GAMINI'S ASSASSINATION — THE INDIAN FACTOR

By Taraki

The LTTE leadership which has thus been extremely wary about what it perceives as Delhi's plans to crush the Eelam struggle and in that process finish off the Tigers as well, through infiltrators within and through other Tamil groups loyal to the RAW, became quite conscious of a third factor since the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord — the Sinhala politician who could muster India's trust and support to deal with Tamil secessionism.

The LTTE made its first statement in geopolitics in May 1986 — it ruthlessly massacred the TELO and shot dead Sri Sabaratnam. It explained its action to the people of Jaffna thus: "The TELO was being armed and groomed by India as a fifth column in the north east to crush the Eelam struggle and to finish off the true Tamil liberation fighters. We, therefore, had to take pre-emptive action."

This came as a surprise to many Tamils at that time who had taken it for granted that India was on the side of the armed Tamil groups in general. The TELO leader Sri Sabaratnam, had consistently made the claim that only India could help the Tamils establish a separate state (particularly in a lengthy interview he gave to their official publication 'Elutchi' praising India.) When the LTTE struck, the TELO was undoubtedly the best armed Tamil group which was also numerically far superior to the Tigers. But the Tigers had made their move at the correct juncture — TELO was riven by an internecine struggle

to persistent anti social behaviour. Since then the LTTE has at every crucial turn of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka attempted to pre-empt, what it saw as moves by India to weaken the Eelam cause. For the LTTE the question is not whether India is still interventionist but whether it should take any chances with a country which has a great stake in stifling Tamil secessionism in view of its strategic and economic interests in its southern parts where 60 million Tamils live.

The Tigers not only view India as the only power they have to reckon with ultimately in establishing a separate state for the Tamils but consider it the greatest threat to their existence as a military force. Hence the LTTE has been extremely vigilant and alert in the matter of negating India's influence at three levels — within the organisation, among the other Tamil groups and since the departure of the IPKF, among the politicians of the south.

It can be said that the LTTE was the only organisation which could not be properly infiltrated by any of the Indian

groups were basically operating from South India.

Prabhakaran never introduced or showed any of his key lieutenants to the RAW or the I.B or the Q branch. The situation was such that when the Indians had to get hold of Baby Subramaniam who was very active in Tamil Nadu during the IPKF's offensive in Jaffna, they realised none of their Intelligence agencies could come up even with a picture of the man — for them he was only a name, no one had ever seen him.

But all other Tamil groups while they were in India were divided and manipulated at ease by the RAW, nurturing factions, promoting lackeys and whenever the need arose, arming and helping them set up their own groups. Once a senior leader of a pro Indian group told me "Ours, comrade, is the only group which cannot be accused of being infiltrated by the RAW" after a pause, seeing that I was bewildered, said "because we have become an extension of it".

The LTTE meanwhile took every precaution possible to prevent the Indian agencies from buying influence within. It eased out those who had come into close contact with Indian operatives. The retirement of one of its senior leaders Kundappa is a case in point. And more recently the main reason it gave for Mahathaya's arrest and detention — that he was involved in a conspiracy by the RAW to eliminate the Tiger leadership — has to be seen as a clear signal to India,

about ulterior designs to destabilise its power in the North East. The LTTE leadership which has thus been extremely wary about what it perceives as Delhi's plans to crush the Eelam struggle and in that process finish off the Tigers as well, through infiltrators within and through other Tamil groups loyal to the RAW, became quite conscious of a third factor since the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord — the Sinhala politician who could muster India's trust and support to deal with Tamil secessionism.

It also dawned on them after they took on the Indian army that India which was even determined to use military force to crush Tamil secessionism in view of its strategic interests could become ultimately the best bet for Sinhala leaders who were also faced with the same problem — the enemy's enemy, is a friend.

The LTTE therefore became extra vigilant about developments in southern politics as well, keeping an eye on those it thought were being cultivated by India.

Standing out among them was Mr. Gamini Dissonayake whose consistency in arguing India's inevitable role in resolving the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka the trust Sri Sabaratnam had placed in Delhi's bureaucrats.

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that the Accord has isolated the LTTE" (Sunday Island 1-1-89). The LTTE did not take kindly to this and similar statements made by him. They began to present him to the Tamils as another arch lackey of the Indian government. In fact when Gamini was dropped from the Cabinet by Premadasa in March 1990 — at the time when the IPKF had begun its withdrawal and the TNA was falling apart — an LTTE controlled paper published a cartoon showing an Indian soldier and Gamini out of his house.

Although the LTTE commenced the Eelam War Two in June 1990, it was able to rest assured on the assumption that Premadasa was a sure guarantee against any form of Indian in-

attitude towards Gamini further confirmed their belief. The danger of intervention at this juncture in their view, was from the Indian side — with Rajiv continuing to insist on the terms of the Accord in handling the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka.

The LTTE was also alarmed at reports of a friendship treaty that was being negotiated with Delhi. When the New Year's ceasefire declared in 1990 by the LTTE unilaterally — which appeared to be looked on with favour by Premadasa — was scuttled by the army apparently with the tacit approval of the then State Minister for Defence Ranjan Wijeratne who along with the Generals was of the view that the LTTE was doing it out of sheer desperation, the Tigers began to suspect that India might encourage the hawks in the army and the establishment to weaken both Premadasa and then in the long term, Ranjan was seen as the only person capable of giving effective political direction to the prosecution of the war and a leading hawk. He was blown up.

But the threat from the Indian side persisted in the LTTE's view, as long as Rajiv who had a stake in the Accord was alive. He was also blown up.

But the Tigers continued to believe that India was keen to get rid of Premadasa in order to facilitate moves to punish them. They assumed that a punitive strike by the Indians in the aftermath of Rajiv's assassination on selected Tiger targets in the peninsula had not been carried out because of Premada-

tion of extradition Premadasa had even gone to the extent of saying that he could not let the Indians have their way. In this situation the LTTE was only too sure that India would do everything possible to scuttle Premadasa's rule. And when the impeachment came the LTTE was sure that Gamini was in cahoots with Delhi. They had two options. One was to eliminate Gamini and the other was to see that Premadasa had the necessary strength in Parliament to defeat the motion. They went for the second option. They sent the leader of the nine EROS M.P.s who was under their control in Jaffna to be renominated to parliament. Commenting on this I wrote in these columns at that time "The LTTE's decision should primarily be seen from the point of view of their extraordinary concern with and anxiety about India. The Tigers have scrutinized the impeachment motion. They clearly want Mr. Premadasa to remain in power. He, obviously is their only perceived guarantee against India. Their view about Mr. Gamini Dissonayake's position on India's role in Sri Lanka has been stated unequivocally in their official publications" (29-9-91).

Their concern with Gamini waned after Premadasa survived the, impeachment. I have commented on how later they found that Premadasa himself was moving closer to India while following the two pronged policy of speaking peace and waging a harsh war. Premadasa was bombed to pieces in May 92.

Since then the LTTE had nothing

by the fact that Gamini has joined the UPNP and a report in the press that D.B. and Gamini are together going to visit India". Gamini's fate then was sealed in February.

The LTTE watched Gamini gradually but inexorably taking over the UNP. And then he became the Presidential candidate of the party. Gamini also visited India when the campaign began to worship Lord Venkataswamy in Thirupathi.

Given India's economic liberalization program and the new style in diplomacy it seems to have inspired in sections of the Indian foreign policy establishment which apparently are becoming somewhat assertive, is it still relevant to view India as an interventionist hegemon as the LTTE would have it?

The Tigers have two reasons for doing so, which from their point of view, are crucial. One, the case on Rajiv's assassination in which Prabhakaran and Pottu Amman are the main accused is still pending.

Two, India has an abiding interest in seeing to it that the spectre of Tamil secessionism does not raise its head again among its own 60 million strong Tamil population. These two reasons are compelling enough for the LTTE to ruthlessly terminate whatever they perceive to be tentacles of Delhi's influence in Sri Lanka.

— D.B.'s line on the ethnic issue suited them well, they had demonstrated their military prowess at Kilaly and at Pooneryn — until it became clear to them early this year that Gamini, who had rejoined the UNP, was once again becoming a power to reckon with in southern politics.

The February issue of the LTTE's official organ 'Viduthalai Pulihal' carried a lead story which said "The Sinhala chauvinists join hands: the Sinhala war giant prepares." The Sinhala chauvinists who are happy with President D. B. Wijetunga's stand are supporting him and are strengthening the bands of chauvinism. As an important part of this process Mr. Gamini Dissonayake 'famous for burning the Jaffna library has joined D. B. This should not be taken as a usual party crossover or the normal act of a politician.

The Tamil nation should take careful note of the fact that chauvinist groups which have been dispersed until now, Bhikkus and powerful chauvinist politicians are coming together. Though there may be personal interest behind these moves, it cannot be denied that this will be a great challenge to the struggle for Tamil rights. This coming together is being secretly encouraged by India. There cannot be any doubt that Gamini is an Indian lackey (Inthathasara). The above view is affirmed

● The reference to the 'Battle of the causeways' in last week's column 'Reopening the Pooneryn Causeway' was from Jane Russell's book 'Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution 1931-49'. Though the said reference was within quotation marks mention of the source was inadvertently