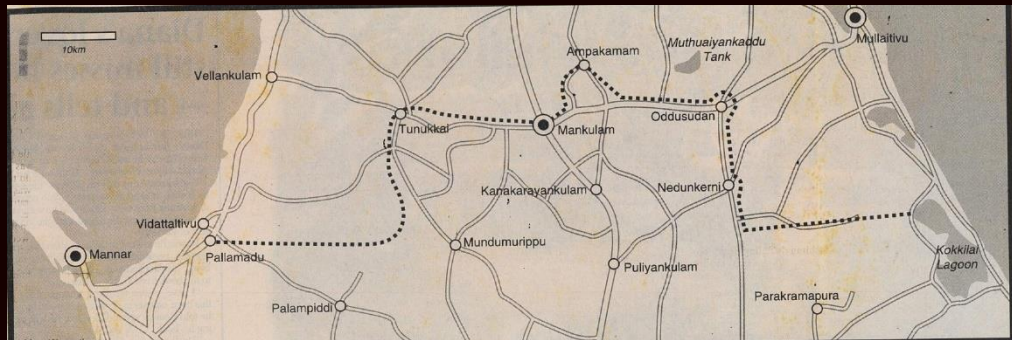


'Watershed' amid rain of mortars. (1999, October 17). The Sunday times.



'Watershed' amid rain of mortars

Rows of ambulances, all men wailing, choked the Galle Road stretch from Ratmalana to Colombo throughout last Thursday. They were headed for City hospitals.

Curious City residents resumed what has become a routine chore on such occasions - making phone calls to various quarters, friends, Police, Army, the media among them - to ascertain which incident had caused the casualties.

News was out in Colombo's grapevine that the Army had launched another operation in the Wannu. Details remained sketchy and most senior officials connected with the operation remained tight lipped.

At 11 am Thursday, two Divisions of the Sri Lanka Army, 55 and 56, launched 'Operation Watershed'. They advanced north eastwards from the general area of Ampakamam, where the security forces' defence just in like an elongated box. The aim of the operation is to attack LTTE positions and seize more land area. Security Forces Commander, Wann, Major General Wasantha Perera, is in overall charge of the operation.

In executing the latest operation, the Army wanted to spring a big surprise on the

SITUATION REPORT



BY IQBAL ATHAS

LTTE. This is in the belief that Tiger guerrillas would not have expected any security forces advance in view of the onset of the north east monsoon. Heavy rains have continued in the area in the past two weeks. As the two Divisions advanced on Thursday, they came under heavy artillery and mortar fire. Tiger guerrillas kept on firing 122 mm artillery, 60 mm, 81 mm and 120 mm mortars, once more clear proof that they have replenished their stocks substantially. Most of the fire came from the direction of Muthuayankaddu.

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The fighting on Thursday turned out to be bitter. At least 45 bodies of Tiger guerrillas,

Exclusive ATGM identified as AT 4 Fagot

British ballistic experts have identified the Anti Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) fired at Paranthan defences last month by Tiger guerrillas as an AT 4 Fagot known by the NATO name Spigot.

This ATGM (designation 9M113) has been established from parts of the suspected missile sent by the Army for tests in Britain.

British authorities are keen to have sent a preliminary report to Army Headquarters confirming the exact identity of the ATGM. A further report giving more details including country of manufacture and other specifications is expected shortly.

The British finding lays to rest speculation over the identity of the ATGM. Western diplomatic sources were quoted in these columns last week as claiming the missile to be a Malyutka (NATO name Sagger) in view of its man portability, cheaper price and availability. Expert findings have now dispelled any doubt. The confirmation of the identity now shows that the LTTE has gone for a more expensive and sophisticated first generation version. The Fagot is manufactured in Bulgaria, Iran, Romania and the Russian Federation.

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Body Armour deal takes shocking turn

The controversial, long drawn out deal by the Sri Lanka Army to procure 3,000 pieces of Body Armour from a British supplier has taken a new and shocking turn.

Lightweight Body Armour Limited (LBA), which was the tender award and supplied the consignment to Sri Lanka Army in April this year, has filed action in a London Court for breach of contract. LBA is demanding the payment of 750,000 Sterling Pounds (over Rs 72 million) for 3,000 pieces of Body Armour supplied.

A writ in regard to the case, issued by London Courts, has been delivered to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, last month, by officials of the Consular Section of the British High Commission in Colombo. This in effect means that the Government has been formally informed through diplomatic channels about legal action that has been instituted in the country concerned against one of its security forces. In June, this year, Sri Lanka Army rejected the entire consignment of 3,000 pieces. The Army claimed that out of eight randomly selected pieces, three had failed tests.

The rejection came after the supplier turned down three conditions placed by the Army. If it were to accept the Body Armour consignment in question, the consignment of Body Armour remains in the Army stores in the City whilst the LBA-Arm dispute ended in a deadlock. With the news of the legal action, came another shocking discovery.

Much to their embarrassment, senior Army officials have discovered that fifty per cent of the payment due to LBA Ltd, has already been remitted by the Bank of

Ceylon's Metro Branch. How did this come about? Did any Army official write to the Bank recommending that half the cost of the consignment be repaid to the supplier? If this was the case, why was no approval obtained from higher authority?

The Sunday Times learns that efforts by the Bank, after higher military officials learnt of the remittance, to recover the payment made has not been successful. The recipient's bank, to which the monies have been sent, has refused to return it.

This has placed the Army in a dilemma. As is the usual practice, legal circles say, a part payment constitutes an acceptance of the product by the supplier. In this instance, you argue, it amounts to the Army accepting the consignment of 3,000 pieces of Body Armour, though as a matter of fact, the hierarchy rejected it and believed no payment should be made. The Army Legal Division is to seek the advice of the Attorney General's Department on how to tackle this knotty problem. On the other hand, legal costs for fighting the case in London is also to be very high.

It is also not clear whether any officer will be held accountable if or she has been found to be responsible for the conveyance of errors over the procurement. The only senior Army Headquarters has taken since this deal became public is to find out how the Sunday Times obtained details.

The Sunday Times of June 6, this year, reported that the British supplier and Army Headquarters were locked in a row over the deal. A Letter of Credit has been opened for the shipment, the terms had covered a 50 per cent down payment once an Acceptance Certificate is issued after tests. The Army, however, had not issued this certificate since the tests (on three pieces failed) and hence no payments have been made to the firm.

Dutiful Army officials issue an Acceptance Certificate when none other than the Commander, 1st Gen, Sri Lanka Weraosooriya, had ordered the rejection of the consignment. 7 The Sunday Times learns that the Ministry of Defence is officially aware of the Sri Lanka Army's rejection and not about the fifty per cent down payment made. One of the last intimations from the Ministry of Defence was a letter the Army's Master General Ordinance Manager, General S.K. Sopyabandara, wrote to Defence Secretary, Chandanadasa Silva, on May 28, this year.

He informed the Ministry that an consignment of 3,000 pieces of Body Armour (worth \$ 1,011,360 or Rs 72,466,204.80) from LBA Ltd, was not being accepted by the Army until they adhered to three conditions. They are:

- Supplier to replace the rejected Body Armour with new ones.
- Supplier to provide a Certificate of Guarantee that in the event of an injury to a soldier due to the failure of Body Armour, compensation will be paid by LBA Ltd.
- Inform the supplier to replace the jackets marked with 'Small' with either 'Large or Extra Large jackets (if available).

The second condition, demanding compensation from the supplier in the event of injury (or even death) to a soldier was an unprecedented move. It turned out that an Army officer, ignorant of procedures and military norms, was responsible for the demand.

A fax embodying the three conditions from the Sri Lanka Army was faxed to LBA Ltd, through their Colombo agents, May 20, 1999. The move saw the arrival in Colombo of A.F. Sales Manager for talks with Army officials. He insisted that the consignment was 'fully in accordance' with the Tender Specifications, Official Order and Letter of Credit.

On a letter dated May 24, this year, Mr. Deadman responded to the Army's three conditions in a letter to its Commander, Lt Gen. Sri Weraosooriya. This is what he said:

1. The jackets supplied are already fully in accordance with the Tender Specifications and therefore do not require replacement.

2. No. IJ III means that the particular Body Armour was built using the same material and production techniques and is identical in design to that tested by the National Institute of Justice in Maryland, USA, or a laboratory or test house that is approved.

In real terms, this means the Body Armour stopped a variety of precisely described rounds at given velocities, with less than a given amount of rear face deformation (trauma), usually expressed in millimetres.

Since the jackets are in accordance with NIJ specification, provision of a compensation guarantee (for soldiers receiving injuries) is not necessary. The event of a soldier being injured, since we are able to prove that the plates meet the NIJ specification, it would have to be concluded that the typical velocity of that particular bullet was not in accordance with NIJ specification.

3. The jackets have also been supplied fully in accordance with the Tender Specifications, Official Order and Letter of Credit.

"We therefore regret that we cannot agree to replace them with large and extra large sizes as you have now requested."

The award of the tender to supply 3,000 pieces of Body Armour to LBA Ltd, was the culmination of a two year long effort by the Sri Lanka Army to procure this item for soldiers, as exclusively reported in the Situation Report - May 30, 1999.

The move ended in a 5-asso after tests were carried out on eight randomly selected pieces, at the Commander, Regiment Headquarters at Gemunupola. Three Army officials declared they cannot accept the consignment unless the suppliers accepted the three conditions including the unusual request for compensation in case of injury.

The deal to procure 3,000 pieces of Body Armour, for which world-wide tenders were invited since mid 1997, has been studded with various internal issues and procedural wrinkles.

LBA Ltd won the award after their local agent protested over rival suppliers on grounds that included a claim that some officers did not meet requirements set by the Army.

The Jungle Telegraph

By Alia

'Well done' message

The public relations element in him won the hearts and minds of many militia and troops. Whether it was downing a scotch and soda at a cocktail party or talking business at one-on-one meetings with his local counterparts, Pakistan's military strongman, General Pervez Musharraf, exuded both charm, poise and confidence.

After a hectic schedule that marked the Army's 50th anniversary celebrations, he played a game of squash last Tuesday morning at the five star hotel where he stayed. That seemed his last task.

Later that afternoon, he spoke with his Sri Lankan Liaison Officer, Brigadier Upalal Bandula, as they drove to the Bandaranaike International Airport for a return journey to Pakistan.

After an overnight stop over in Karachi, he would be in Islamabad the next day, he said.

The journey in a Pakistan International Airways flight was to make world news. Gen. Musharraf staged a coup to oust Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. He has captured the attention of the Chief Executive of Pakistan and has introduced martial law.

Yet, the new Pakistani leader will take comfort that he has an exception in a retired Sri Lanka Army man, one who welcomed the bloodless coup, there were none to publicly commend Gen. Musharraf's actions, no world leaders put other dignitaries.

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