

INQTA

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**Sent:** Sunday, January 23, 2011 5:55 AM  
**Subject:** RAW & Sri Lanka

Training Camps in India.

Sri Lankan Tamil militants had been getting training abroad since 1975. A Sri Lankan Tamil called Eliyathambi Ratnasabapathy (Ratna for short) living in London, organised study groups at his Wandsworth home on the guerrilla struggles then going on in various countries. He had links with the PLO and arranged training from them in Lebanon in the use of firearms. There were survival courses and training in a variety of guerrilla tactics. Douglas Devananda, now a minister in the Sri Lanka government complained: "We were asked to wear boots 24 hours a day. They gave us plenty of cheese and oranges but there was no rice."

In 1981, retired Indian army officers had helped set up training camps around Madras in Tamil Nadu and trained around 30 men from the TELO and the LTTE.

Tamil youths were flocking to the militant groups for many reasons. One strong reason, according to MR Narayan Swami was, "a strong rumour had begun to circulate in Tamil areas. India, the giant of south Asia, which so many Sri Lankan Tamils regarded as their cultural motherland, was ready to accept, train and arm young Tamils willing to fight for Eelam."

Tamil Nadu governments had long provided a haven for Tamil separatist militants from Sri Lanka. The central government under Indira Gandhi connived in this and tolerated the existence of bases and training camps in other parts of India. The origins of these bases go back to before the riots of 1983.

Mrs Gandhi was at odds with Junius Richard 'Dickie' Jayawardene, Prime Minister and later Executive President of Sri Lanka, as he reversed Mrs Bandaranaike's attempts to establish a socialistic command economy and turned Sri Lanka towards liberal free-market economic policies. The two neighbouring leaders also disagreed about foreign policy, especially Afghanistan and the Falklands. Mrs Gandhi also regarded Dickie as too pro-Western – he allowed a Voice of America station in Sri Lanka and opened up Trincomalee harbour to Western commercial interests.

Indira Gandhi decided that she would give Tamil militants the support of the Indian government and of the Indian secret service, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Word soon spread through the north of Sri Lanka that Mrs Gandhi was prepared to train and arm Tamil guerrillas and hundreds of young men and women left their homes to travel to Tamil Nadu.

Training began in Dehra Dun in Uttar Pradesh in September 1983. Subramanian Swami said that training was carried out at a RAW base at Chakrata north of Dehra Dun. That area was selected because the high mountains and military establishments provided cover for what was going on. From then on hundreds of Sri Lankan Tamil boys travelled by train from Madras to New Delhi and then on to Dehra Dun by trucks and buses. One group was detained by Indian police, who had not been appraised of what was going on, before leaving Tamil Nadu. The police took their names and addresses before RAW intervened.

PS Suryanayarana, in his book, The Peace Trap, quotes Tamil tiger leader Prabakaran as saying that he first met RAW officials in Pondicherry but did not specify a date. According to MR Narayan Swamy, Prabakaran's biographer, between 1983 and 1987, RAW trained 1,200 Sri Lankan Tamils in the use of automatic and semi-automatic weapons, self-loading rifles, and 84mm rocket launchers and in laying mines. Some were also given training in diving and under-sea sabotage.

Arms deliveries to various groups began in 1984 and went on almost up to the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement in 1987. India persistently denied in public that it was training Sri Lankans and disavowed any aim of splitting up the Sri Lankan state.

There was comprehensive coverage in India Today of training camps in India and reports appeared in western newspapers in April 1984.

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General Vernon Walters, an emissary of the Reagan administration, informed the Indian government on two visits, in 1983 and 1984, that he had evidence of the training camps. He produced photographs and the addresses of Sri Lankan militants living in Tamil Nadu.

Former Sri Lankan national security minister, Lalith Athulathmudalali, has said: "By 1986, Indian diplomats privately admitted that RAW was training people".

However, India had no real interest in the separatist cause. Douglas Devananda has said: "We realised that they were only trying to use us in their game plan." Sources in all Tamil groups now assert that India's motive was to teach Colombo a lesson for being too pro-Western.

It was widely rumoured that Mrs Gandhi was planning to emulate Turkish action in North Cyprus and actually take over at least part of Sri Lanka by military force. Shankar Rajee says an Indian Army officer told him: "we need a scout force to lead us. You are not going to do the real fighting but be prepared."

By 1985 the numerical strength of the Tamil militants would have equalled that of the Sri Lankan armed forces. The LTTE's main bases were at Salem and Madurai.

#### Delhi Accord

Indian facilitation led to talks in Bhutan in 1985 between the Sri Lanka government and representatives of various Tamil groups. There were no positive results but further talks brokered by India led to the Delhi Accord, which set out a framework for ethnic reconciliation and devolution of power to the provinces. The TULF went along with this but the other Tamil groups were reluctant and eventually TULF had to withdraw their assent.

Despite the accord between the two governments, sporadic ethnic violence continued in the north and east of Sri Lanka and the Indian government made little serious effort to stop its territory being used as a base for Tamil militant activity. Rajiv Gandhi found his options limited because the Sri Lankan Tamil separatist groups all had their supporters among government and opposition parties alike in Tamil Nadu. However, none of these parties were able to keep the peace among the rival Sri Lankan factions.

Part of the accord with India was that Sri Lankan forces in Jaffna would stay in their barracks. The LTTE took advantage of this to mine the roads leading to the barracks and convert makeshift barricades into concrete bunkers. The Sri Lanka army could only be supplied by air and the LTTE effectively took control of Jaffna. The LTTE also set about eliminating their Tamil rivals and attacking soft Sinhalese targets to the embarrassment of the government forces that seemed unable to stop them.

As the Sri Lanka army improved its equipment and training and got help from Pakistan, India reverted from mediation to attacking Sri Lanka's human rights record. The Sri Lanka government had treated the Delhi Accord as "a reasonable basis for negotiation and settlement" but India was now condemning the Sri Lankan government's efforts to combat terrorism at the same time as India harboured those threatening to overthrow the Sri Lankan state.

In 1986 there were three months of complex negotiations between the Sri Lankan government and the TULF. The outcome was a set of proposals sent to India in September. There was a stumbling block in that Tamil groups in general pressed for a single provincial unit joining the northern and eastern provinces as a single Tamil ethno-region. The Sri Lankan government were against this because of strong Sinhalese, and also Muslim, opposition to the idea of the east as a predominantly Tamil region. By conceding the east the government would allow its electoral base and stability to be eroded.

The main difficulty, however, was that these complex considerations were taking place in a fantasy world. It was akin to the British and Irish government having civilised discussions with each other and the Ulster Unionists and the Social and Democratic Labour Party, while it was the Provisional IRA and the Ulster Volunteer force bombing and kneecapping people.

William Clarence of the UNHCR put it thus: "Essentially, the Accord was an agreement between the two governments, deciding over the heads of the Sri Lankan Tamils, the shape of their political future."

The Indian and Sri Lankan governments were keen to deal with the TULF as the main representative of Tamil opinion in Sri Lanka but this was divorced from reality. The TULF had voluntarily exiled themselves in Tamil Nadu,

thereby effectively cutting themselves off from Sri Lankan Tamils. The LTTE had filled the vacuum left by the TULF and was determined to accept nothing less than a separate state of Eelam and were not prepared to recognise the lead role of the TULF.

Rajiv Gandhi's dilemma now was how to persuade the Tamil separatists to accept what he believed to be a workable framework for an honourable peace. The LTTE alone refused to accept. For the first time the Indian government tried to impose restrictions on the LTTE's activities in Tamil Nadu. Amid rumours of a unilateral declaration of independence, Sri Lankan forces tried to clear the north and east of LTTE fighters and largely succeeded with the rebels fleeing to the Jaffna peninsula.

#### Indian Peacekeeping Force

The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was signed on 29 July 1987. When Rajiv Gandhi was inspecting a guard of honour prior to leaving Colombo for India in July 1987, a Sinhalese naval rating struck him a heavy blow with his rifle. This symbolised the resentment of many Sri Lankans at India's interference.

The intention was to use the might of the Indian Army to bring a swift end to the ethnic conflict in the north and east of Sri Lanka. India blithely expected the LTTE to hand over its arms to the IPKF but the Tigers refused to go beyond a token handover and firmly resisted IPKF efforts to disarm them. The LTTE was as ready to fight the Indians as it was to fight the Sinhalese.

The Indians at first sent 10,000 troops but unexpected resistance from the LTTE led to an increase to 100,000, some estimate more.

The Tamil Tigers fought the Indians and the Sinhalese also were not happy about the Indian intervention. Even the cabinet was split, with Prime Minister Premadasa opposed to it as was security minister Athulathmudalali. The Marxist Sinhala nationalist party the JVP were bitterly opposed as were many Buddhist monks.

Sri Lanka accused India of violating its sovereignty and international law by sending the Indian air force to drop food supplies on Jaffna. The Tamil Nadu chief minister, MG Ramachandran made a well-publicised gift of \$3.3 million to the LTTE.

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Premadasa had been opposed to the accord from the outset. When he succeeded Jayawardene as president in December 1988, tensions between Sri Lanka and India increased. Premadasa saw the removal of the IPKF as essential to restoring order to the south after the bloody JVP uprising because the Sinhalese nationalist JVP traded on bitter opposition to Indian interference.

Withdrawal was completed in March 1990. Over 1,000 Indian soldiers had been killed and over 2,000 wounded. The financial cost to India of its intervention in Sri Lanka was put at around \$1.25 billion.

The cost was, in fact, far higher. Rajiv Gandhi's mother was the architect of India's interventionist policy. He oversaw its intensification and he paid the ultimate price. On 21 May, 1991, Rajiv Gandhi attended his last public meeting at Sriperumbudur, about 30 miles from Madras in Tamil Nadu. He was campaigning for the Congress candidate for the area. At 10.10 p.m a female Black Tiger called Thenmuli Rajaratnam, known as Gayatri or Dhanu approached Gandhi and greeted him. She bent down to touch his feet in the traditional Hindu expression of respect and detonated an explosive belt tucked under her dress containing 700 grammes of RDX. The assassination was caught on film through the lens of a local photographer, whose camera and film were found at the site. The cameraman himself also died in the blast but the camera remained intact.

Judge Thomas of the Supreme Court of India ruled that the killing was carried out because of the personal animosity towards Gandhi of LTTE leader Prabhakaran. Four of the conspirators were sentenced, in their absence, to death.

Premadasa was assassinated by the LTTE in 1993.

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