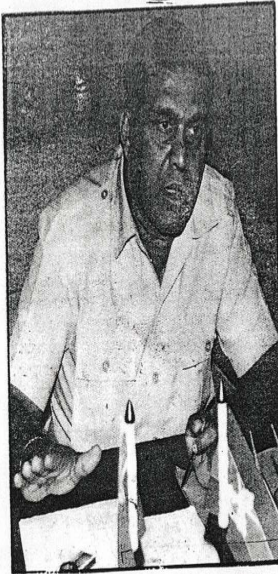


Tigers' big business links. (1993, July 25). *The Sunday Times*.

Tigers' big business links



Gen. Hamilton Wanasinghe: job Down Under



Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne: effects new promotions

By Our Defence Correspondent

Businessmen in the Jaffna peninsula may make money in large measure by undertaking assignments for the LTTE. It often comes to them from the finance and intelligence sections of the group. But woe be unto them if they fall out of line.

Here is an account of what happens when such situations occur as the University Teachers for Human Rights in Jaffna had discovered.

The elite sections of the LTTE are those dealing with finance and intelligence, and not the fighting sections glorified for popular consumption. This comes from the highest authority within the organisation. These sections are led by persons, now middle-aged like the leader, and close to him through clan and kinship.

Those dealing in finance work closely with selected merchants, can grant them special favours and enjoy considerable freedom in managing their private interests. This has enabled the LTTE to monitor, control and exact payments from the entire merchant class.

The merchants in turn smuggle in rare materials, such as fuel, using their contacts. When there is a smooth working relationship with the LTTE, life can be mutually profitable.

But yet curious circumstances have landed many of them in prison. Several cases of merchants held are straight-forward. They are or were held pending payment of ransom, often beyond their means.

During the IPKF presence many merchants were placed in an unenviable position. Before the IPKF arrived, they already had a working relationship with the LTTE. Later they tried to do a balancing act between the LTTE and the pro-Indian groups. But the LTTE received an overwhelmingly high proportion of their payments. Several of those in prison are said to have been 'fervently' pro-LTTE, as much as the word could apply to a businessman.

As the IPKF withdrew, members of pro-Indian groups left some of their arms with traders for safe-keeping, not suspecting that these traders also dealt with the LTTE or were too scared to keep the arms. As the LTTE took over, these traders handed over these arms to the LTTE. Some however retained some revolvers and such like.

This they did, not to challenge the LTTE. But as shrewd businessmen they suspected that the present order of controlled robbery was not permanent, but may at any time dissolve into anarchy. Then they would have to protect themselves. One of them was Sri, of Valambika Stores, Stanley Road, Jaffna, who kept back two pistols.

The Tigers came to know of this through Anastine, a boat-owner and contact of Sri, detained in connection with unauthorised smuggling. Sri was detained and released after paying a fine of Rs. 1½ lakhs. A similar fate overtook the proprietor of Every Day Stores, Palaly. Whether he was released is not known.

Ranganathan was the owner of Murugan Hardware

Stores near the Chavakachcheri Police Station, destroyed in the TELO attacks of 1984. Though an LTTE sympathiser, he had retained a revolver recovered from the ruins of the Police Station.

Kannan, a former member of the LTTE and recently appointed by the LTTE to the local vigilance committee, led a gang of robbers. In robbing Ranganathan's house, his revolver had also been taken. Later apprehended by the LTTE, Kannan told everything. Ranganathan was arrested and sent to Urelu. Kannan and Co., were put to sleep.

Marimuthu Satkunam had a small shop in Palaly and was arrested on the charge that he had sold the EPRLF paper 'Viduthalai' during the IPKF presence.

Several months later, on June 10, 1990, he was released and ordered to leave the Tamil region within a month. This he was unable to do owing to the outbreak of war. He was re-arrested on August 18, 1990.

Gunaratnam, a wholesale rice merchant in Jaffna was arrested on the charge that he had used another militant group to get rid of an inconvenient person. He was released after buying a Pajero Jeep for the LTTE. This happened before the war.

Perhaps the most revealing of cases that have come our way is that of Suthanantham, owner of SPS Traders, Jaffna. Though close to the Tigers, Suthanantham also did a balancing act. He also it appears, maintained friendly contacts with the Tamil politicians based in Colombo. Suthanantham was also very close to Kutti, who was the LTTE leader's hand-picked man in charge of supplies.

Kutti boasted that it was he who kept the LTTE leader on, a full stomach. He stopped lorries carrying goods from Colombo to Jaffna in the Vanni Jungles and took what he wanted. This was during the IPKF presence. Whatever he wanted, whether food or fuel, Suthanantham brought it for him. In turn it was spoken in Jaffna that anyone wanting goods transported safely without having them robbed on the way would do well to use SPS.

On one occasion Kanthi and Shoot of the LTTE's intelligence unit asked Suthanantham to give them some fuel for their own use. Suthanantham told them that all that he gives, he gives Kutti and that they should ask him. Owing to his rapport with Kutti, the matter ended there, for the time-being.

Kanthi and Shoot had their chance much later. The editor of 'Puththolir' was kept under surveillance. On searching his house they found a letter from the Tamil politician in Colombo, suggesting that any sensitive letters could be sent through SPS. Kanthi and Shoot took in the SPS proprietor Suthanantham.

After being tortured and reminded of his earlier refusal to give them fuel, he was told that his release was conditional upon the payment of Rs. 50 lakhs. As his wife was delivering a child, a fellow businessman had him released for 48 hours on a personal guarantee. 4 months later he was released upon the payment of Rs. 25 lakhs.

From generals to diplomats, the shuffle continues

Will the coming months see new faces spearheading the ongoing battle against separatist terrorists?

Already Army Commander, Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne, has effected a series of personnel changes. They came in the wake of a series of new promotions announced by Army Headquarters.

But now comes the report that JOC Chief Hamilton Wanasinghe, who is due to reach 60 years will retire from service. His chequered career has made him the longest serving General in the Sri Lanka Army.

General Wanasinghe is strongly tipped to be Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in Australia.

General Cyril Ranatunga who moved into Canberra only in May this year, *The Sunday Times* has learnt, has been told to wind up there and assume office as Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in Britain. The latter will succeed General Sepala Attyagalle, who has returned to Colombo to become Chairman of Air Lanka and security adviser to President.

added to the travails of long serving career diplomats in the Foreign Ministry, many of them highly talented and experienced.

Already Foreign Minister Harold Herat, fast acquiring a reputation for his deft handling of the weekly post Cabinet news briefing, is under pressure to accommodate some of the careerists and thus relieve the frustration in their ranks.

Insiders say Mr. Herat will in consultation with President D. B. Wijetunga make some changes in overseas postings. There are reports that the impending exercise will also mean the recall of some postings already made, at least two plum positions.

Meanwhile Army Commander Cecil Waidyaratne appears to be the obvious choice as JOC Chief when General Wanasinghe retires.

In such an event Major General Jerry Silva, a popular soldier with enormous experience in the separatist war, will become the new Army Commander and Major General Lucky Algama, GOC Eastern

will be promoted from the battlefield to greener