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Who is the Traitor?

**Exclusive
Interview with
Karuna Amman**



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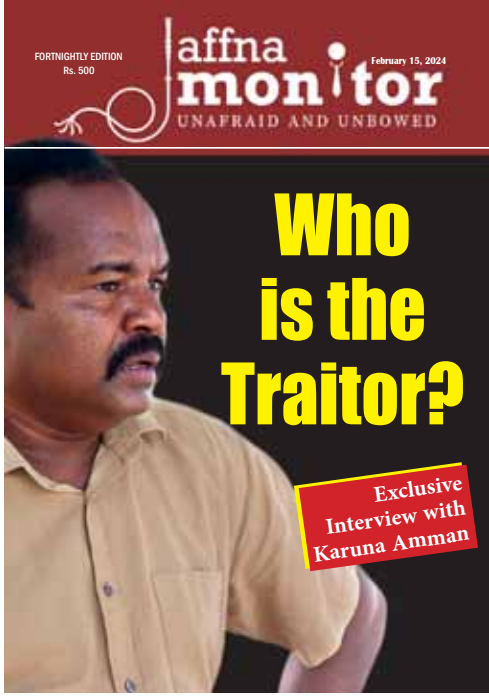
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Unveiling the Untold: An Exclusive Interview with Karuna Amman

As we release the February 15th edition of the Jaffna Monitor, we are proud to bring our readers a range of powerful, thought-provoking content that underscores our commitment to uncovering and sharing diverse perspectives and stories.

In this edition's spotlight is an exclusive interview with Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan, better known as Colonel Karuna Amman. Recognized as a skilled military leader in the history of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Karuna Amman's insights are pivotal for understanding a complex era in Sri Lanka's history. Our team's journey to Eastern Sri Lanka for this in-depth conversation reflects our dedication to bringing to light lesser-known narratives. This interview is particularly significant, marking one of the first occasions Karuna Amman spoke so openly. We look forward to sharing more from this enlightening conversation in future issues.

Our dedication to showcasing a range of narratives continues with a beautifully crafted translation of 'Kaṇṭi Vīraṇ' by renowned Sri Lankan Tamil writer Shobasakthi. Translated by the adept Eluttukkiṇiyavan, this work not only makes a celebrated piece accessible to more readers but also emphasizes the importance of valuing our rich linguistic heritage.

Additionally, we continue with Part 3 of the Anton Master interview and Part 4 of 'Mahathaya's Saga.' As with the previous instalments, we delve into stories that have remained untold, shedding light on aspects of the Sri Lankan Tamils' armed struggle.

For cricket fans, this edition doesn't disappoint, offering captivating cricket stories that provide a lighter complement to the intense political and historical narratives.

We believe that by understanding diverse perspectives, we foster a more inclusive, well-informed society.

Thank you for joining us in this journey of exploration and reflection.

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor- Jaffna Monitor

INTERVIEW

Photos: Sabry

Who is the Traitor?

**Exclusive
Interview
with
Karuna
Amman**

Part-1

BY:

Kaniyan Pungundran

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan, widely known as Colonel Karuna Amman, is often recognised as the most skilful military leader in the history of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)). He joined the LTTE in 1983, spurred by the ethnic violence of that year, and swiftly climbed the ranks to become one of the most trusted bodyguards of Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE. His career progressed rapidly, and he eventually assumed the role of the commander of the Eastern Province. Notably, in 1997, amidst Operation Jayasikurui (which translates to Operation Certain Victory in Sinhala), he was elevated to the position of the chief military commander of the LTTE's infantry divisions, with a command of approximately 40,000 fighters.

On July 26, 2004, Karuna Amman decisively broke away from the LTTE and sent approximately 7,000 eastern fighters back to their homes after making them relinquish their arms. This move, stemming from his allegations of the LTTE's neglect of the eastern Tamil community, marked a critical turning point in the conflict. The defeat of the LTTE in 2009 is attributed to several factors, but the departure of a highly skilled commander like Karuna Amman, along with his disbanding of a substantial number of fighters, is often cited as a key reason. This action not only significantly contributed to the LTTE's eventual downfall but also to the death of their leader, Prabhakaran, and played a crucial role in the conclusion of the 30-year-long Sri Lankan Civil War.

Many supporters of the LTTE and related media outlets label Karuna Amman as a traitor,

accusing him of abandoning the Tamil Eelam movement. Conversely, numerous parents in the Eastern regions, whose children were sent home by Karuna Amman after laying down their weapons, view him as a hero who rescued their offspring from the severe conditions of the conflict.

Jaffna Monitor embarked on a mission to understand the reasons behind Karuna Amman's separation from the LTTE, traveling to Murakkoddanchenai in Batticaloa for an in-depth conversation with him. This exclusive interview offers a comprehensive overview of our dialogue with Karuna Amman.

We come from Jaffna, a region where many LTTE supporters perceive you as a traitor. Conversely, several former LTTE fighters and leaders we have spoken to hold you in high regard, some even describing you as the most capable and brilliant military commander in the LTTE's history. Can you shed light on the circumstances that led to your departure from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)? There are various theories and speculations – what is your perspective on this matter?

"To fully address your question, exploring the background encompassing my involvement,



From right to left: Velupillai Prabhakaran, Paduman, and Karuna, the respective commanders of Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Ampara districts, captured in a rare moment in the Niththikaikulam forest, Mullaitivu, circa late 1988 or early 1989.



Karuna alongside his leader Prabhakaran in the Niththikaikulam forest, Mullaitivu, circa late 1988 or early 1989



Regi, the elder brother of Karuna

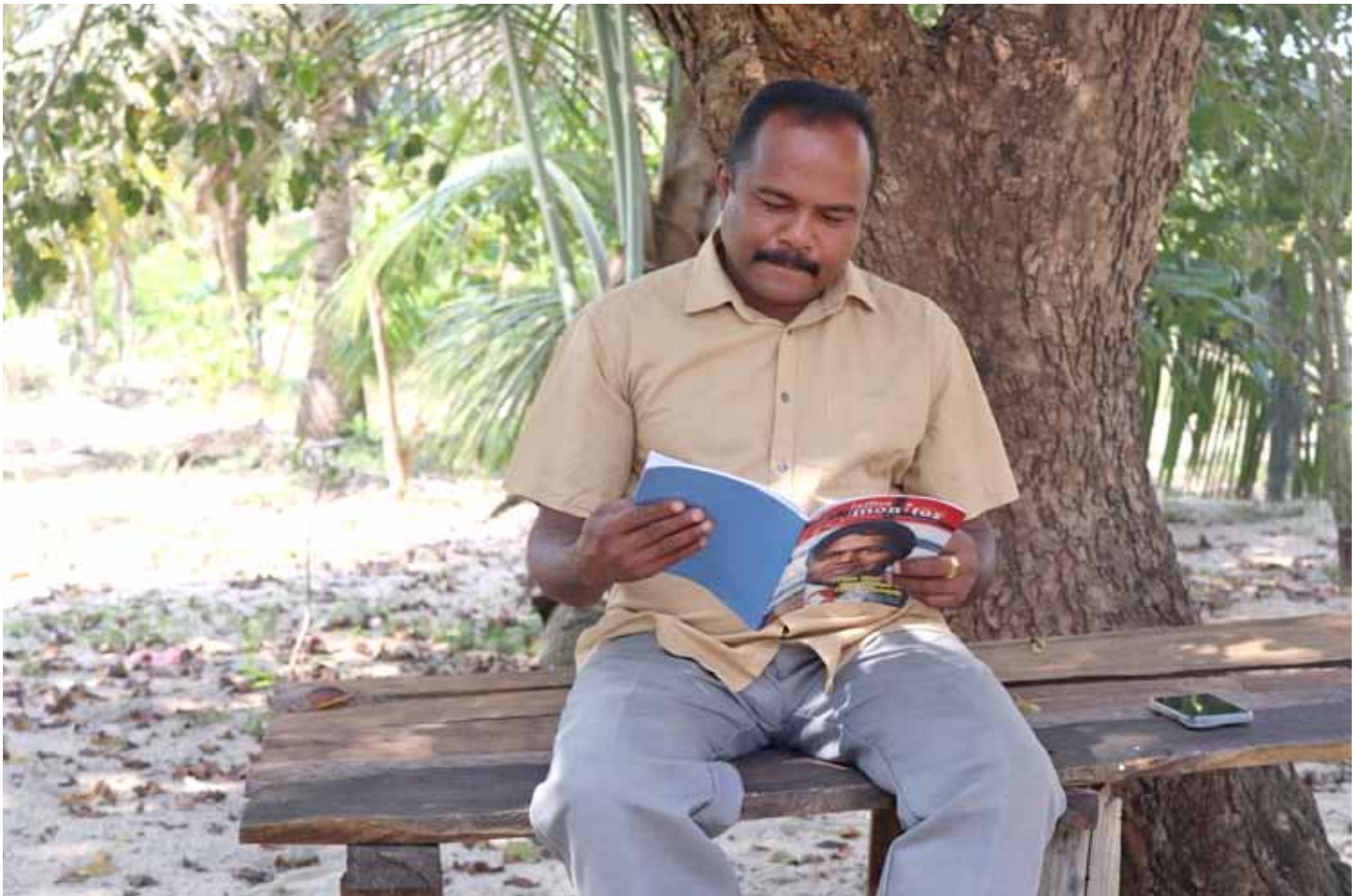
the LTTE, and the Eastern fighters is important.'

He settled into a comfortable position, crossed his legs, and started to speak with a composed attitude.

'The LTTE has been a disciplined and strict organisation since its early days; there is no room for doubting this fact. Similarly, I continue to regard the leader of the LTTE, Prabhakaran, as a charismatic leader, and in this regard, there is also no room for argument. It was he who nurtured us. Had there been no Prabhakaran, the name Karuna

Amman might have remained obscure. My respect for my leader, Prabhakaran, was, and still is, unwavering.

After the July 1983 riots, all movements, including the LTTE, experienced significant growth. During this time, my elder brother Regi and I chose to join the LTTE. The main reasons for our decision



Karuna Amman engrossed in the latest edition of the Jaffna Monitor magazine.

were the discipline and control within the LTTE organisation, coupled with Prabhakaran's excellent leadership skills and the aura he possessed.

After the 1983 riots, the Tigers comprised approximately 365 initial members. These members were split into three groups for training and sent to India. I belonged to the third group that underwent training there. Our training camp took place in Kolathur, located in the Salem district of Tamil Nadu, at a farmhouse owned by the Tamil Nadu politician 'Kolathur' Mani.

The contribution of the then Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, in nurturing the LTTE was very significant. Similarly, the role of the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M.G. Ramachandran (MGR), was also important. There was an excellent relationship between MGR and Prabhakaran. MGR, being a heroic

figure, might have admired the heroic actions of Prabhakaran and the LTTE.

From the training camps, Prabhakaran would personally select some of the outstanding performers for his personal team based on their physical fitness, behavior, and skills demonstrated during the camp. I was among the few selected from our third batch to be part of Prabhakaran's team. Immediately after completing the training, I was inducted into his team. Subsequently, I underwent various types of specialised training while being with him. Training specific to bodyguards and intelligence was provided. I received this training and became a part of the leader's personal bodyguard team.

Prabhakaran had a special fondness for the fighters from the Eastern Province. He often engaged in casual conversations, shared laughter, and played with them. He was particularly

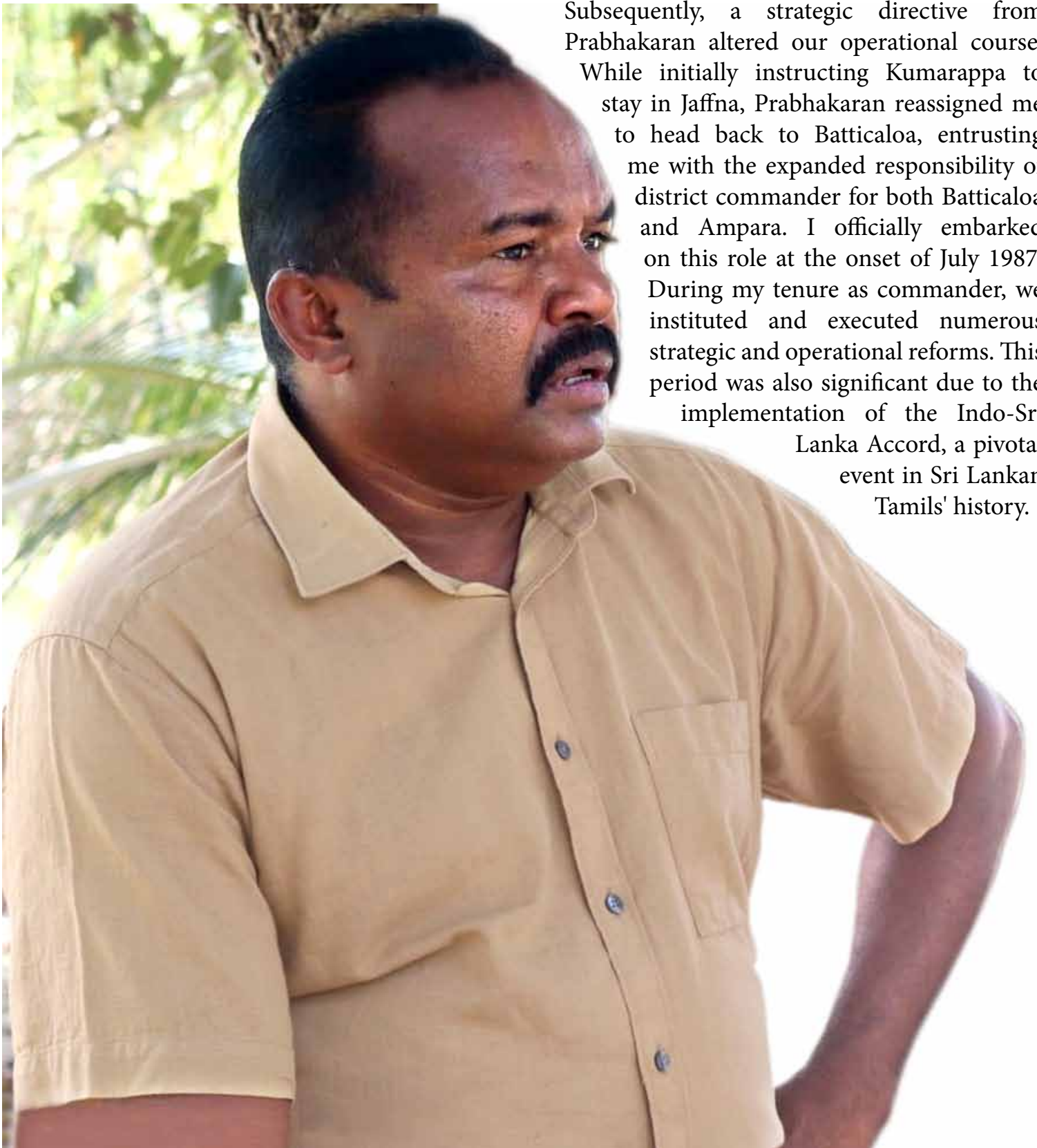
fond of the Eastern slang of these fighters. During that period, Aruna was responsible for the Eastern region. Meanwhile, we were with Prabhakaran in Chennai, maintaining relations with the Indian government and coordinating resources.

In late 1985, when the Eastern commander, Aruna, came to Chennai, he was injured in an accident, leaving a vacancy in the East.

Subsequently, Prabhakaran assigned me to go to Batticaloa. This was my first visit to Batticaloa after completing my training. At that time, Kumarappa was the commander of Batticaloa, and I worked under his command. During the Operation Liberation battle that began in May 1987, Eastern commander Kumarappa went to Vadamarachchi with some Eastern fighters, and I joined them.

Subsequently, a strategic directive from Prabhakaran altered our operational course.

While initially instructing Kumarappa to stay in Jaffna, Prabhakaran reassigned me to head back to Batticaloa, entrusting me with the expanded responsibility of district commander for both Batticaloa and Ampara. I officially embarked on this role at the onset of July 1987. During my tenure as commander, we instituted and executed numerous strategic and operational reforms. This period was also significant due to the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, a pivotal event in Sri Lankan Tamils' history.



During the tenure of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, Kumarappa and Pulenthiran were apprehended while in the process of transporting a shipment, which included not only weapons but also vital and confidential documents related to the LTTE. These documents held immense value, encompassing international communication records, details of commanders and area commanders, and other critical information. This apprehension took place as they were transferring these sensitive materials from the LTTE's military office in Chennai to Jaffna by boat.

The Sri Lankan government, recognising the strategic importance of the documents over the weapons, intensified its focus on this discovery. In a dramatic response to their capture, Kumarappa and Pulenthiran resorted to suicide by consuming cyanide. This act precipitated a significant escalation in the conflict between the Indian Army and the LTTE. At this critical juncture, while in close consultation with Prabhakaran, I followed his directives and travelled to Batticaloa. Upon my arrival, I found myself engaged in direct combat with the Indian forces.

Almost all commanders of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) harboured doubts about their ability to win a war against India. Key figures such as Pottu Amman, Soosai, and Nadesan cited injuries and eventually fled to India. At that time, Prabhakaran was in the Nithikaikulam forest in Mullaitivu.

As the situation escalated and grew increasingly complex, I received a crucial directive from Prabhakaran. The message was succinct and urgent: "The situation is deteriorating; gather whoever is available and proceed to Mullaitivu." In response, I mobilised alongside my brother Regi, leading a contingent of approximately

150-200 Eastern fighters to Mullaitivu.

Upon reaching the area, we united with Prabhakaran in the Manal Aru forest to defend against the Indian Army strategically. Our foremost goal was safeguarding our leader, Prabhakaran, especially during Operation Checkmate, an IPKF operation targeting his capture or elimination. Together with Balraj, Commander Anbu, and other key members, we created a protective ring around our leader to ensure his safety.

Concurrently, the Vavuniya commander Jayam and others coordinated with Maththaiya on the Mallavi front. Adding to our strength, the former Jaffna military commander, Kittu, rejoined our ranks after returning from India. Our confrontation with the Indian forces was intense and determined as we sought to prevent their advance towards Prabhakaran.

Our efforts were singularly focused on safeguarding our leader, Prabhakaran. The battles were fierce, and our resolve unyielding. Despite our tenacious defence, we suffered significant losses, with many Eastern fighters falling during the conflict.

During the peak of the conflict with Indian forces, many LTTE fighters had been killed by the Indian troops; some left the movement, while others fled to India. The ones who remained to fight in the forests were our group in the Batticaloa district, Paduman's team in Trincomalee, and Anbu, Mahathaya, and Balraj also stood their ground and fought. Apart from these, no one else steadfastly supported Prabhakaran. Key figures like Pottu Amman, Soosai, and Banu fled to India without informing the leader. Ironically, those who initially left Prabhakaran later became prominent commanders of the Tigers.



But, they say Pottu Amman went to India for additional medical treatment after being injured...

Medical facilities were available in the forest where Prabhakaran was based. But did everyone who got injured really flee to India for treatment? On one occasion, Prabhakaran jokingly asked his commanders whether Semmalai, the initial point of his base, was nearer or if it was India.

Ok.. Then what happened?

At a certain point, circumstances led to the withdrawal of Indian forces. Anton Balasingham was a key figure in diplomatically influencing this development. He was a skilled diplomat who adeptly handled numerous challenges on behalf of the LTTE, often saving the organisation from difficult situations. This is a fact I can confidently affirm to anyone.

When the Indian Army opted to withdraw, India's trust in the LTTE had eroded. Simultaneously,

a robust relationship developed between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. Following this, the Sri Lankan government engineered circumstances that made it untenable for Indian forces to remain in Sri Lanka. Prior to the withdrawal of Indian forces, groups opposing the LTTE came together to establish the Tamil National Army (TNA), supported by India. The TNA was mainly stationed in the Eastern Province.

Following the withdrawal of the Indian Army, a significant conflict erupted between the TNA and the LTTE. LTTE managed to bring the Eastern Province under control during this conflict. It was, indeed, a horrific fratricide.

I believe that the reason for our defeat in the Tamil Eelam struggle was the short-sightedness of the leaders of the liberation movements. All the militant groups were embroiled in conflict, tragically killing each other, allowing the enemy to witness our internal strife with amusement. The capture of the Eastern Province by the LTTE was a pyrrhic victory for the Tamil community. While the Tigers did not suffer a major loss, the



Jayanthan, the first Sea Black Tiger from the Eastern Province, alongside Prabhakaran.

conflict resulted in the deaths of approximately 7,000 to 8,000 Tamil fighters from the TNA.

Looking back after many years, what are your thoughts now about the LTTE's elimination of members from other movements? Do you feel a sense of sadness and guilt about the fratricide committed by the LTTE?

I believe that eliminating members of other movements was definitely not the right course of action; it was a grave mistake. We revered our leader, Prabhakaran, and never questioned his commands. We always acted solely on command all the time, often without awareness of the immediate or future consequences. We followed orders without hesitation; as youngsters, we did whatever we were ordered. Even if we had been ordered to commit suicide, we would have done it. That's how we were brought up in the movement.



Insignia of the Jayanthan Regiment

Was it brainwashing, Amman?

Undoubtedly, what we experienced was brainwashing. There was a strong allure towards our leader, Prabhakaran, accompanied by a systematic indoctrination that glorified dying for the Tamil race and leader. This mindset was instrumental in the establishment of the Black



The formidable Jeyanthan Regiment, once commanded by Karuna Amman.

Tigers. Back then, our understanding was limited. We regarded every order as if it were a divine command.

Please continue...

In my view, the defeat of the liberation movements can be largely attributed to a lack of foresight among their leaders. The takeover of the Eastern Province from the Tamil National Army inflicted substantial losses on the Tamil community. The conflicts that began in Pottuvil and spread to Cheddikulam Musalkutti might



have been preventable. It was a situation where both sides were primarily focused on mutual destruction. Had there been better understanding and communication among the leaders of the Militant organisations, such losses might have been averted. Mistakes were made on both sides, with a notable fault lying with the LTTE. The leaders should have been more contemplative about their strategies. As for the fighters who were merely executing orders, how could they have recognised the error of their actions in the heat of the moment?

We did not fully grasp the severity of the situation when the LTTE eradicated Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) in 1986, leading to the loss of hundreds of our Tamil brethren, nor did we comprehend it when Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) suffered the same fate at the hands of the LTTE within the same year.

My firm belief is that all fighters who took up arms for the cause of a separate Tamil nation, irrespective of their group affiliations, deserve honour and recognition. Our enemies skillfully and systematically nurtured a sense of hatred among us, turning us into unwitting victims. The young men who embarked on a mission to fight for Tamil Eelam against the Sinhala chauvinist government tragically found themselves in a dire situation, compelled to surrender to the very forces they opposed. This is a shameful incident in the history of the Tamil struggle.

What changes occurred within the LTTE following the departure of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)?

Following the departure of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), the number of

individuals joining the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) from the Eastern Province significantly surpassed those from the North. This was partly due to the disillusionment among Northern people caused by internal conflicts and killings within the movements. Many North parents were more inclined to send their children abroad for safety amid these circumstances. During this period, the Eastern Province faced severe military impositions and witnessed numerous massacres. As a result, many youths from the Eastern Province joined the LTTE.

In 1993, under my command, an elite infantry formation named the Jeyanthan Regiment, comprising highly skilled fighters from the Eastern Province was established. The motto of the Regiment, “எங்கும் செல்வோம். எதிலும் வெல்வோம்,” translates to 'We will go anywhere. We will win at anything.'

The Jeyanthan Regiment, named in honour of Jayanthan, the first Sea Black Tiger from the Eastern Province, was renowned for its exceptional combat capabilities. Strategically positioned in the North, the Regiment played a crucial role in ensuring the safety and protection of the LTTE leader, Prabhakaran. The fighters selected for this Regiment were frontline combatants, adept at safeguarding the leader under any circumstances. This Regiment was instrumental in executing several major operations. These included the Battle of Pooneryn (Operation Frog), Operation Unceasing Waves, targeting the Mullaitivu army camp, Operation Jayasikurui, and many more. These operations highlighted the Regiment's crucial role in the LTTE's military strategies and its significant contribution to the organisation's combat efforts.

The mainstream Tamil media Often overlook

the contributions of fighters from the Eastern Province in the northern battles. The fighters from the Eastern Province often met their end far from home, in the Northern Province, rather than in the East. There was a scenario in the East: when our regiments prepared to embark on their journey to the North, the parents of the fighters would come and wail in front of my camp, pleading with me not to send them to the North. The North was known as the 'killing fields' for the Eastern fighters.

After the fall of Jaffna to the Sri Lankan government forces in 1996, the LTTE relocated its primary operations base to the Vanni region. In a significant turn of events, the LTTE seized the Mullaitivu army camp in Operation Unceasing Waves. This camp was the only government-held base in Vanni and was captured just three months after the Jaffna Peninsula fell to government forces. This critical triumph in Operation Unceasing Waves, which resulted in the loss of hundreds of fighters from the Eastern Province, allowed the LTTE to gain complete control over the entire Vanni region.

While the Sri Lankan government forces maintained control over the northern tip of Jaffna, their supply lines to the south were heavily dependent on sea routes, as the land route, including the A9 or Kandy Road, from Vavuniya (under government control) to Jaffna, passed through LTTE-controlled territory in the Vanni. In a strategic move to secure this vital route, the Sri Lankan army initiated 'Operation Jayasikurui' on May 13, 1997. Had Jayasikurui succeeded and the A9 has been captured, it could have marked the end of the LTTE.

Before 'Operation Jayasikurui,' the Sri Lankan army had executed 'Operation Edibala' to take control of the main road from Vavuniya to Mannar. I recommended to our

leader, Prabhakaran, that we avoid a direct counterattack. Instead, we adopted a strategy of feigning defence while strategically retreating, thus creating the illusion that we were incapable of a counterstrike. This approach tied up about 10,000 army personnel in 'Operation Edibala.' The army's preoccupation with this route was a deliberate part of my plan to divert their attention to a less critical location. Prabhakaran agreed with this strategy.

Once successful, it was apparent that the Sri Lankan army's next objective would be to capture the A9 highway. The control of the A9 highway was critical. If the A9 highway were to be captured, the Vanni region would have easily fallen into the hands of the government forces, effectively making it impossible for the movement to continue. Indeed, during the final war, the moment the Sri Lankan army seized control of the main A9 highway marked the technical defeat of the LTTE.

Prabhakaran convened a meeting with all commanders to discuss the battle. During the meeting, the Jeyanthan Regiment proposed that Eastern Province forces should be tasked with offence rather than defence. The other LTTE commanders, frightened by the recent loss of Jaffna, readily accepted this suggestion despite the high risk of casualties and destruction it carried. Meanwhile, the Jeyanthan Regiment organised approximately 2,000 fighters from the Batticaloa district and 600 from the Trincomalee district to counter the Jayasikurui attack.

The defence was set up under Theepan's leadership. On the first day, Theepan's fighters lost one kilometre. On the second day, another kilometer was lost, and by the third day, Theepan's defense team had retreated a total of three kilometers. The Sri Lankan army advanced close to Puliyankulam.

Jeyanthan Regiment had not yet started the attack. Within the organisation, other commanders began criticising them, questioning when they would begin to attack. Instead of confronting the advancing army from the front, they circled around to the back and attacked from the side at Thandikulam. A fierce battle ensued. The army suffered significant losses, and the war was halted for 12 days. The Thandikulam battle caused substantial damage to the army. The BBC described it as 'LTTE entered the battlefield from the back, like an elephant entering a cornfield.'



Karuna Amman with his leader Prabhakaran.

The army began advancing again, and in response, the Jayanthan Regiment led another attack, inflicting heavy damage on them. This resulted in the battle stalling for 22 days. At this juncture, Prabhakaran began to believe we could win the war. Then, one day, he summoned us to Puliyanukulam. Up to that point, our fighters had not seen the leader, and there was an intense desire among them to meet him. Remarkably, about 180 of our fighters had already fallen in the Jayasikurui battle without having seen him. Prabhakaran had invited all the commanders to this meeting, although the reason for his summons was unclear. He also brought delicious food for the fighters.

Prabhakaran ascended the stage, and a sense of anticipation filled the air. With a commanding presence, he began to speak. In an unforeseen turn of events, he announced that I, Karuna Amman, was to be elevated to the prestigious role of the overall commander of all LTTE infantry divisions. The weight of his words hit

me like a thunderbolt. Such a monumental appointment had never flickered through my mind, not even in the most ambitious corners of my imagination.

As Prabhakaran's words resonated through the meeting hall, I couldn't help but notice the air of dissent that began to brew subtly among some of the commanders. A few commanders present at the meeting, including Pottu Amman, the head of the LTTE's intelligence wing, visibly did not welcome this decision, as was evident from their facial expressions. I also somewhat realised that this appointment could lead me into unnecessary trouble. To be honest, I had no desire to take on this responsibility. From that day forward, key figures within the LTTE, like Pottu Amman, began to harbour resentment toward me.

Pottu Amman, armed with his keen strategic acumen, began to quietly yet effectively marshal support from other LTTE commanders against me. It was as though he was skillfully constructing a labyrinth of opposition around me and began digging a pit against me.

To be continued.....

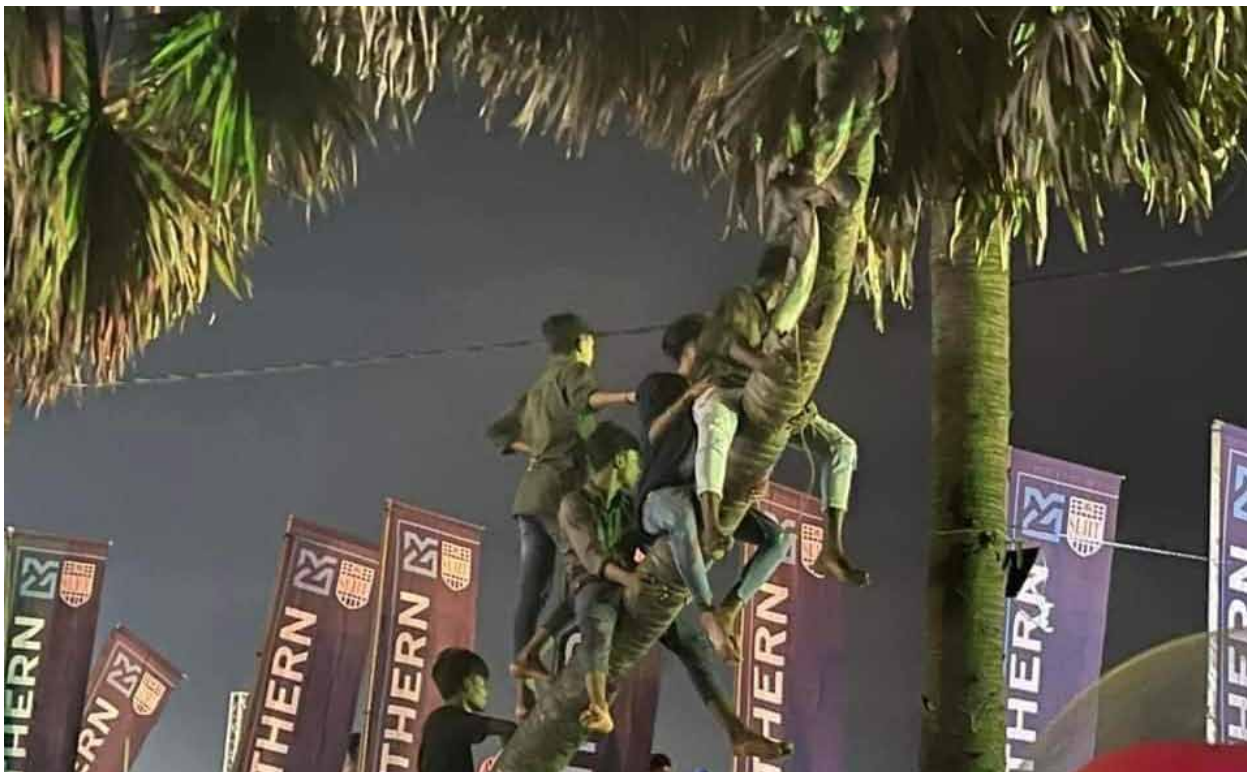
Jaffna's Jam-Packed Jamboree



BY:
Our Special Correspondent

Recently, the renowned singer Hariharan's music show at the famous Muttraveli open arena in Jaffna ignited both excitement and controversy. The event was graced by the presence of celebrated actress Tamannaah, who performed her 'Kaavala' dance from the movie 'Jailer'. As expected, the performance

electrified the youth in attendance. However, there was a degree of mismanagement on the part of the organizers, which led to the event being prematurely abandoned. The inability to control the overwhelming enthusiasm of the crowd ultimately resulted in the disruption of the show.



*Enthusiastic
Youths
Braving
Challenges
to See
Hariharan's
Recent Music
Show in
Jaffna*

The show became a point of contention, with opinions sharply divided: some attendees celebrated the enthusiasm of the youth, while others expressed their disapproval.

Adding a whimsical twist, photographs of several youths perched on a Palmyra tree and an electricity pole for a better view of the performance amused people across various Tamil-speaking districts in Sri Lanka and even in parts of Tamil Nadu. However, the event also drew fierce criticism from Tamil nationalist supporters and LTTE sympathizers, some of whom went as far as to denounce it as a ploy by the Sri Lankan government and its intelligence agencies to sway the mindset of Jaffna's youth.

We will not delve into the debate over the appropriateness of such musical shows. Instead, we offer a glimpse into history. On July 20, 1985, the Student Organization of Liberation Tigers (SOLT), the student wing of the LTTE, organized a large music show at the Chennai Nehru Indoor Stadium. The chief organizer of the program was Pulavar Pulamaipithan, the "Arasavai Kavignar" (poet laureate) of M. G. Ramachandran's (MGR) government.

The musical performance featured legendary composer Ilaiyaraaja and his younger brother Gangai Amaran. Legendary singers such as S. P. Balasubrahmanyam, S. Janaki, Vani Jairam, Malaysia Vasudevan, Deepan Chakravarthy, S. N. Surendar, Kovai Soundarajan, S. P. Sailaja, and A. E. Manoharan, also known as Ceylon Manoharan, graced the event.

A vast audience gathered for the concert, with the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister taking on the role of an informal organizer. He issued directives to his officials, the police, and the media to ensure the event's grand success.



Photo of the poster announcing the music show organized by the Student Organization of Liberation Tigers (SOLT) on July 20, 1985, at the Chennai Nehru Indoor Stadium"

Additionally, he arranged for notable actors such as Vijayakanth and Sathyaraj, along with a few actresses, to attend the event, further adding to its allure.

Remarkably, the Student Organization of Liberation Tigers (SOLT) managed to raise funds from this event, achieving a level of financial success that was unprecedented for the organization at the time. To facilitate a smooth experience for attendees, the Tamil Nadu government went the extra mile. Special buses were deployed to ensure participants could return home safely. Moreover, regular government bus services were extended until 1 AM, specifically to accommodate those attending the event. Hundreds of Sri Lankan Tamils residing in Tamil Nadu flocked to the event, having been invited by the LTTE.

So, everyone can relax - even the LTTE once-organized musical shows featuring cinema stars.



From left to right, seated: 3rd is Suban, Mannar Commander, 4th is Robert, also known as Vellai, 6th is Lt. Col Anpu. Standing: 5th is LTTE Chief Prabhakaran, 6th is Kirupan. Photo taken in 1987 at Nithikaikulam Forest in Mullaitivu

Mahathaya's Saga:

Power, Paranoia, and Politics in the LTTE

The curious case of Kirupan and the increasing paranoia about RAW



BY:

Kaniyan Pungundran

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

In 1987, Kirupan, initially serving as a bodyguard to Prabhakaran, gradually garnered his trust and confidence. His ascent within the organization became particularly pronounced following Prabhakaran's definitive move from India to Sri Lanka in the same year. Recognizing Kirupan's loyalty and capabilities, Prabhakaran 1989 entrusted him with the significant responsibility of managing the LTTE's operations in India.

Allegations point to Kirupan's involvement in the massacre of 13 members of the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation



Sivarasan



David, one of the assassins involved in the Padmanaba operation

Front (EPRLF), including Secretary-General Padmanabha, on June 19, 1990. However, reliable sources relayed to the Jaffna Monitor that Kirupan was actually not informed about the attack on Padmanabha. This operation was orchestrated by the LTTE's intelligence wing under the leadership of Pottu Amman, with One-Eyed Sivarasan executing the plan. The assault team included David (Christopher Antony Mariythass- Polikandy- Jaffna) and Ravi, a 1st batch trainee of tigers. (now residing in London), and Daniel is also alive, living somewhere in an overseas country, all under Sivarasan's command.

Shanthan- one of the accused in the Rajiv murder case, worked as an informant. Credible sources within the LTTE intelligence wing, who were aware of the execution of



Padmanabha

Padmanabha's attack, have suggested to Jaffna Monitor that one of the leaders of the EPRLF, who is now a prominent Tamil Nationalist politician, also acted as an informant for Pottu Amman's team. This followed an agreement between Pottu Amman and the so-called politician, mainly encompassing the sparing of his life from the Tigers' attacks.

Pottu Amman, who became the head of the intelligence wing in December 1989

and was fully operational by January 1990, deployed Sivarasan to India for specific missions and assigned Charles to Colombo for intelligence tasks. The assassination of Padmanabha, ordered by Pottu Amman, was the first major attack planned and executed under his direction. This incident was extensively documented by the LTTE. Credible sources told Jaffna Monitor that one assassin



Large Crowd Gathers at Funeral of Pathmanabha and 14 Other EPRLF Members, Mourning the Tragic Loss Following the Kodambakkam Attack on June 19, 1990

took photos of the dead bodies of Padmanabha and his team with a film camera. This attack, along with the photographic evidence, served to consolidate Pottu Amman's position within the organization and strengthen his ties with Prabhakaran. Prabhakaran was particularly impressed with the way Pottu Amman's team executed the ruthless plan and photographed the dead bodies in detail.

In India, Kirupan's primary responsibilities involved acquiring essential resources for the LTTE, such as fuel, explosive materials, boat fiber, and medical supplies. A colleague from the LTTE, who worked with Kirupan in India, described him as a dedicated individual with an innocent appearance. However, the behavior of his subordinates often bordered on brutality. These individuals were known for their aggressive tactics, which included brandishing firearms at Tamil Nadu police,

assaulting local residents, and even firing at vehicles on highways.

An enduring associate of the LTTE has shed light on the evolving relationship with the Indian Tamil community. Initially, the LTTE garnered support through shared cultural and linguistic connections, characterized by expressions of love and kinship. However, this approach underwent a transformation during the tenure of Raghu, Kiruban's predecessor in India. Kiruban, following in his predecessor's footsteps, shifted focus towards financial incentives for the Indian Tamils and, at times, resorted to violence with them to achieve his objectives.

In the early part of 1991, following these events, Kirupan was arrested near Neelangarai in Chennai and subsequently detained in Vellore jail. Kiruban reportedly escaped

while being transported under police escort from Vellore to the Pudukkottai courts near Maraimalai Nagar. Upon returning to Jaffna, he captivated the LTTE leadership, including the LTTE supremo, with his dramatic escape story, reminiscent of a James Bond film. His return was celebrated by the LTTE supremo with a special lunch feast, and Kiruban was subsequently granted a leave of absence for a few months, during which he returned to his hometown of Point Pedro.

However, Pottu Amman harbored suspicions about Kiruban's escape. He had his informants engage with Kiruban and noticed discrepancies in the escape story told to Prabhakaran and himself compared to what was shared with his informants. Additionally, Kiruban's escape occurred after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, a time when security measures in Tamil Nadu were significantly heightened, and many LTTE associates were either arrested, went into hiding, or severed ties with the LTTE due to fear of repercussions from Indian authorities. Therefore, the feasibility of Kiruban's daring escape as he described it was questioned by Pottu Amman, casting doubt on the authenticity of his account.

Credible sources within the LTTE's intelligence wing revealed to Jaffna Monitor that Pottu Amman, armed with a file on Kiruban, approached Prabhakaran to request custody of Kiruban. Prabhakaran, already influenced by paranoia, readily agreed. Kiruban was subsequently subjected to severe torture and coerced into confessing that he was a Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW or RAW) agent and had attempted to eliminate Prabhakaran.

This confession was forced in a meeting attended by most of the leading members of the LTTE, sending a clear message about the consequences awaiting those who strayed from

the organisation's line. Following this, Kiruban was eliminated. Pottu Amman harbored a conspiracy theory that RAW, India's foreign intelligence agency, had turned Kiruban into a double agent. He believed that Kiruban's supposed escape was staged by RAW and that Kiruban was assigned to assassinate Prabhakaran.

Many influential LTTE members still believe that Kiruban was indeed a mole planted by RAW. A former member of the LTTE's intelligence wing, who had extensively discussed Kiruban's case with the leaders of the intelligence wing, told Jaffna Monitor that Kapil Amman, Deputy Leader of the Intelligence Wing, Mathavan Master, Head of the LTTE Intelligence Training Centre, and Sangeethan, head of the intelligence wing's education wing (who was secretly referred to as 'Saguni' by intelligence wing members due to his cunning nature and tendency to speak ill of others to his boss, Pottu Amman), confirmed that Kiruban was indeed a mole planted by RAW. However, there is also a perspective within the LTTE that Kiruban was innocent and not an agent of RAW. A few prominent LTTE members who spoke with Jaffna Monitor believe that he indeed made a successful and daring escape, only to ultimately fall victim to Pottu Amman's paranoia.

Regardless of the truth, this incident significantly heightened the paranoia of Prabhakaran and Pottu Amman towards India and RAW, leading to what was described as a 'RAW Phobia' within the organization. This deep-seated fear prompted the LTTE to carry out numerous ruthless executions that would typically be unthinkable for any rational individual.

To be continued.....

Namal's Temple Run: Politics and Prayers in Ayodhya!

Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) MP and political heir of Mahinda Rajapaksa, Namal Rajapaksa, recently embarked on a politically motivated two-day visit to Uttar Pradesh, India. The highlight of his journey was his attendance at the newly opened and politically charged Ayodhya Ram Temple, a visit that carries significant political resonance.

During his time in Uttar Pradesh, MP Namal Rajapaksa met with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Deputy Chief Minister Brighesh Pathek in Lucknow, where he was reportedly well-received by Indian state leaders. Sources suggest that his journey had deeper intentions. His visit to the Ayodhya Ram Temple was not just a spiritual pilgrimage to seek blessings; it was also perceived as a gesture of seeking blessings from the Modi government.

Sources indicate that Namal Rajapaksa's open support and veneration for the Ram temple during his visit sends



Namal Rajapaksa with his wife Limini worshipping at the Ayodhya Ram Temple.

a significant political signal to the Modi government. This action is seen as an attempt to seek blessings not only from Lord Ram but also from the Modi government, particularly at a time when presidential elections in Sri Lanka are anticipated later this year. Namal Rajapaksa is also mentioned as one of the potential candidates in the upcoming election.

This visit coincides with National People's Power (NPP) leader Anura Kumara Disanayake's visit to India upon an invitation from the Indian government. This suggests that India is taking the JVP-NPP seriously, in contrast to the perception of some Sri Lankans who view the JVP-NPP as a joke.

Anton Master Speaks:

Former Military Office Chief of LTTE Shares His Untold Story with 'Jaffna Monitor'



Part- 3



BY:

Kaniyan Pungundran

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

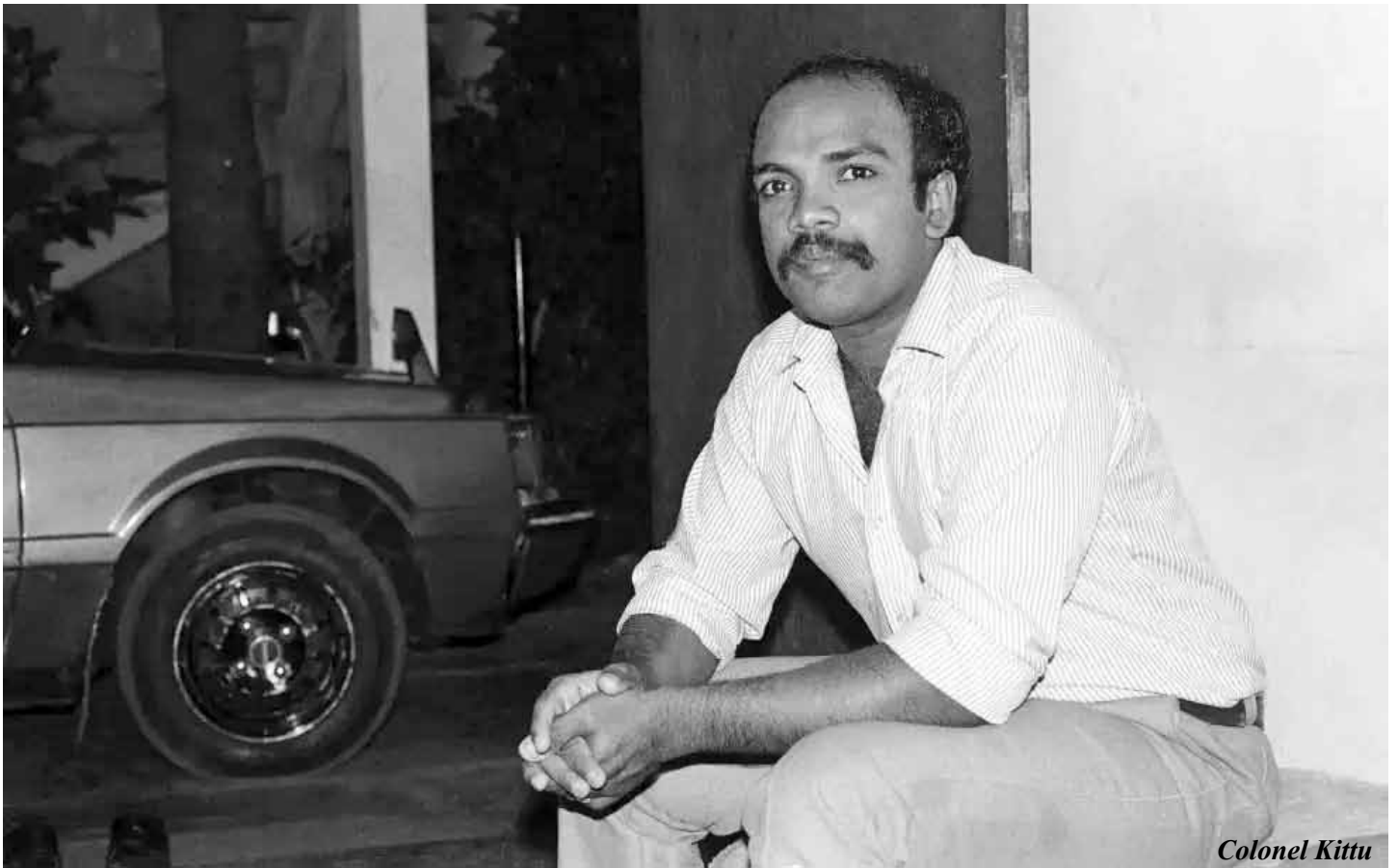
KT Sivakumar, also known as Anton Master, is a prominent early member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and a close associate of leader Prabhakaran. He significantly contributed to the LTTE as a member of its Central Committee and as the founder and head of the Military Office (MO), enhancing the group's military effectiveness. Known for his reticence in media interactions, Sivakumar prefers 'dialogues' over interviews. The following is a part of a series of dialogues I had with him, providing rare insights, which will be featured in the forthcoming issues.

Dark Days in Jaffna: The Execution of EPRLF Members

During the period of the grenade attack on Kittu and subsequently, when Aruna executed members of rival militant groups, primarily EPRLF militants, I was in Jaffna. Even now, I remain uncertain about the exact number of people Aruna killed in the LTTE prison. However, I am aware that about 30 EPRLF members who were detained in Mannar were among the victims. These individuals had arrived from Rameswaram under the belief that the EPRLF was gaining strength in Mannar and that the LTTE was weakening. They came fully armed and were authorized to eliminate any captured LTTE members. Subsequently, they were transferred to the LTTE's prison in Jaffna, where, tragically, they all lost their lives due to Aruna's extreme and reprehensible actions.

"Prabhakaran's Discontent: 'Kittu Has Ruined Everything in Jaffna'"

When Prabhakaran returned to Sri Lanka from India, I was in Mannar. He immediately summoned me.



Prabhakaran asked me to resume control of the Military Office and the Intelligence Division. After some discussion, we agreed to divide intelligence into two sections: I would lead military intelligence, and Ratha would oversee civilian intelligence. Upon first seeing Prabhakaran, he said to me, "Kittu has ruined everything in the Jaffna district." I wasn't surprised but told him not to involve me in Kittu's matters; he should handle them himself. Prabhakaran was extremely dissatisfied with Kittu but felt unable to act against him immediately.

Following Prabhakaran's visit, Kittu's men were gradually removed from the organization. Some left voluntarily, while others were asked to leave. Prabhakaran expressed satisfaction each time one of Kittu's men departed from the LTTE.

Confronting Kittu's False Allegations

Kittu had misjudged me on two occasions

before. The first instance was due to his ignorance in the case of Shankar (the first LTTE member to die). The other was a false suspicion about me in 1986. I believe Kittu misunderstood my intentions when I came to Jaffna from India, thinking I was spying for Prabhakaran in 1986. This might have been because many long-time LTTE supporters shared their grievances about Kittu with me during my stay. They felt neglected by the movement and complained about Kittu's poor treatment. I told them that I couldn't do or say anything; my visit to Jaffna from India was personal and not to inquire about their complaints. I later discovered that while I was in Jaffna, Kittu had sent false information about me to Prabhakaran, claiming that I was interfering in his administration. I proved Kittu's allegations to be wrong.

Kittu's Feudal Tyranny

Kittu's conduct in Jaffna was reminiscent of a feudal lord. It was widely known that



*Prabhakaran
with Kittu in
Jaffna, 1987*

he often resorted to verbal abuse and even physical violence against LTTE fighters. There were rumors that he had physically assaulted Thileepan, a prominent political leader in the LTTE. In the movement's early days, Prabhakaran's uncle, interestingly named Vellupillai, like Prabhakaran's father, played a pivotal role in safeguarding him. Despite this, Kittu displayed no respect towards Prabhakaran's uncle and mistreated him and attacked him. Prabhakaran informed me that his uncle was living in destitution in Jaffna and asked me to arrange the necessary facilities for him. Using LTTE contacts, I secured a house for him in Jaffna.

Attack on Kittu and Aruna's Rampage

A few months after Prabhakaran told me, 'Kittu has destroyed everything,' an unknown assailant carried out a grenade attack on Kittu, resulting in the loss of one of his legs. As soon as I was informed about the attack on Kittu, my Military Office fighters cordoned off the area and conducted extensive search operations. When I arrived at the scene of Kittu's attack, I was confronted with the grim sight of his severed foot in a drain.

We apprehended several suspects, yet those directly responsible for the attack on Kittu remained elusive. While I was overseeing the search operation around the area, a very reliable person came to me and shockingly informed me that Aruna, a senior LTTE member, had entered an LTTE prison and shot dead all EPRLF members. This news enraged me. Upon hearing this, Kittu's issue became secondary to me.

It was around 1 AM when I went directly to Prabhakaran's safe house. He was awake and was surprisingly calm, showing no signs of tension or concern about the attack on one of his key commanders. I argued to Prabhakaran that the killing of the EPRLF prisoners by Aruna was a grave mistake and that Aruna should be immediately arrested. Furthermore, I suggested that the LTTE should publicly apologize to the people for this incident and execute Aruna in a public place as punishment. Prabhakaran agreed with my persistent argument; Prabhakaran ordered the arrest of Aruna, demoted him, placed him under house arrest, and said we would decide Aruna's fate later.



From Left: Prominent LTTE Members Lingam, Aruna, Prabhakaran, Pulenthiran, Victor, and Pottu Amman at LTTE's 5th Batch Camp at Kumapatti, Rajapalayam in Tamilnadu



Commemorative Poster Honoring the Victims of the Kanthan Karunai Massacre

Sometime later, Shankar, the head of the LTTE's Air Wing, met me for a discussion. Shankar's family, which included his siblings Siddharthan, Karan, and himself, were all part of the organization. I had personally recruited Siddharthan into the Tigers and held a special fondness for their family. During our meeting, Shankar mentioned that I had proposed to Prabhakaran that Aruna should be executed as punishment. However, he also cautioned me that there were plans by some individuals to assassinate me in retaliation if Aruna faced execution, advising me to stay vigilant.

Following the attack that resulted in Kittu losing his leg, significant changes were observed in both his demeanor and actions. He began to embrace my viewpoint that engaging in conflict with the Indian army and government was not a viable path to achieving Tamil Eelam. Subsequently, we both represented the LTTE in negotiations with the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) of India.

To be continued.....

A Tamil Journalist's Environmental Journey

BY:
Our Reporter



Murukaiya Thamilselvan

நஞ்சாகும் நிலம்
மு.தமிழ்ச்செல்வன்



Cover of Murukaiya Thamilselvan's Book

Murukaiya Thamilselvan embarked on his journalistic career in 2004 as a sub-editor for the weekly magazine 'Vellinatham,' published by Eelanatham newspapers. Over the course of his 20-year career, Thamilselvan has been noted for his clear and insightful writing on environmental issues. Residing in Kilinochchi, he has dedicated much of his work to shedding light on the environmental challenges faced in this region. His recent book, 'நஞ்சாகும் நிலம்' (Nancakum Nilam)– loosely translated as 'The Land Becomes Poison' – delves into the pressing environmental concerns affecting the Kilinochchi district. In this interview, we explore the insights and experiences that have shaped his journey as a journalist and author.



Illegal Gravel Excavation in the Akkarayan Area of Kilinochchi

What Prompted the Writing of the book 'Nancakum Nilam'?

In my childhood, I witnessed an environment that has now dramatically altered. Over the span of just four decades, there has been a profound transformation in our natural surroundings. This metamorphosis has encompassed every facet of nature - the land, water, air, and forests. Today, it's a rarity to observe house sparrows and baya weavers, once a common sight in my youth, and the once-abundant butterflies are now seemingly extinct. Groundwater levels have plummeted drastically, from a mere twenty or thirty feet to depths of a hundred to two hundred feet.

Health issues that were once a rarity, such as heart attacks occurring in perhaps one in a thousand people, now affect thousands routinely. Diseases like diabetes and high cholesterol, virtually unheard of in the past, have become rampant, with people of all ages regularly lining up at medical facilities. Our

era has transitioned from one where food was akin to medicine to a dire state where our food has transformed into a form of poison. If this downward spiral continues unchecked, the very essence of human survival will be in jeopardy.

When living conditions become untenable, animals and birds instinctively migrate from their habitats. Survival against nature's tide is a battle no species can win, yet humans uniquely strive to reshape nature to meet their own needs, often engaging in activities detrimental to the environment. Consequently, our ecosystem is experiencing severe repercussions. The damage we inflict on nature is now rebounding upon us like a boomerang.

The threat of global warming has escalated to a perilous level. As technological advancements progress, humans are becoming increasingly detached from the natural world. This detachment poses a significant threat to our well-being. This growing disconnect and the urgent need for a collective awakening



Illegal Gravel Excavation in the Akkarayan Area of Kilinochchi



compelled me to pen my book as a call to action and awareness.

Your book mainly concentrates on the environmental issues that the Kilinochi district faces. What do you think is the most pressing environmental issue in the Kilinochchi District?

Kilinochchi District is a beautiful area rich in natural resources, with lakes, rivers, forests, and sand dunes. The beauty and wealth of Kilinochchi lie in preserving these. However, the district is facing environmental degradation in land, water, and forests.

The main problems include illegal sand and soil mining, encroachment and settlement in flood zones of lakes and seasonal rivers, wastage of water, illegal deforestation, and improper waste disposal. While it is inevitable to extract resources from nature for development activities, it is essential to adhere to meticulous and well-thought-out plans and follow the laws related to the conservation of natural resources. The benefits derived from exploiting these resources should not outweigh the harm caused.

But beyond these, the departments and police responsible for addressing environmental issues in Kilinochchi must take responsibility. There are many laws to protect the environment, but the weakness of those enforcing these laws is a significant reason for environmental degradation. Actions against the environment persist until Corruption and malpractice continue.

What Essential Environmental Consciousness Should People Possess?

The essence of environmental awareness lies in recognizing the intrinsic connection between our safety and the health of our environment. The security of our lives is deeply intertwined with the condition of our surroundings. A secure environment is fundamental to the sustenance of life for all species. Therefore, it is crucial for both the public and governing authorities to comprehend that a lifestyle in discord with environmental norms is unsustainable.

This awareness involves understanding the broader impact of our actions on the

ecosystem. For instance, the removal of a single tree not only diminishes the oxygen available to various life forms but also disrupts the delicate balance of our ecosystem. Similarly, alterations in rainfall patterns can significantly impact food production, thereby affecting the entire food chain. Nature's equilibrium is predicated on the harmonious coexistence of diverse species. In our pursuit to secure material possessions such as land and homes for future generations, we often neglect the necessity to foster an environment that supports their well-being.

Another critical aspect of environmental consciousness is water conservation. With a staggering 97% of the world's water being saline, the minuscule 3% that constitutes freshwater becomes exceedingly precious. This small percentage is further subdivided, with 79% locked in glaciers and 20% existing as groundwater, leaving a mere 1% readily available for human use. This stark reality

underscores the urgency for heightened conservation efforts and prudent management of this vital resource.

Our environmental responsibilities extend across various activities, from waste management to energy consumption. Each individual's conscientious actions, aimed at minimizing interference with nature, contribute significantly to environmental preservation. One of the most effective methods to foster a sustainable future is through cultivating widespread awareness about environmental stewardship. Educating people about the significance of their ecological footprint and encouraging

How Should Politicians Contribute to Environmental Causes? What Should Their Stance Towards the Environment Be?



Elected representatives should prioritize the public's best interest, as this is the cornerstone of a democratic election. However, in our current scenario, many politicians seem to base their actions on the potential gain or loss of votes rather than on the welfare of their constituents. A society thrives under good leadership, which is, regrettably, a quality we find lacking. Protecting a nation's heritage and its continued existence is deeply linked to preserving the environment. Unfortunately, it's uncommon to find leaders who genuinely cherish nature and actively commit to environmental conservation.

If the identity of a community is to be preserved, then its very existence must also be safeguarded. Integral to this safeguarding is the protection of the environment in which the community resides. Leaders who demonstrate a genuine love for nature and a commitment to environmental conservation are, regrettably, rare. Politicians need to broaden their efforts beyond merely securing votes when it comes to environmental issues. They should realize that in advocating for the environment, they are also preserving the support of their voter base.

Due to environmental degradation, as mentioned in my book, some villages in the north, like Kunjukulam, have disappeared. If the number of such disappearing villages increases, it will eventually affect the politicians' vote banks. Therefore, for this



reason alone, if not for the greater good, politicians should come forward to protect the environment.

As long as politicians provide relief packages funded by illegal sand mining to people affected by floods and drought, how can the environment be protected?

What Are the Immediate Necessary Changes for Addressing Environmental Issues?

Increasing awareness among the populace is essential, highlighting that coexistence with the environment, rather than antagonism, is vital for survival. Environmental laws must be enforced impartially and rigorously, with strict legal actions against illegal sand mining, deforestation, and improper waste disposal. It is crucial to start environmental education at the school level and extend it into the broader community. Without such proactive actions and heightened awareness, effectively safeguarding our environment remains a formidable challenge.



The Road to 200

Pathum Nissanka's Path from Hardship to Hero



BY:

Our Sports Correspondent

A young man embodying the essence of resilience and determination has recently rewritten Sri Lankan cricket history. Pathum Nissanka, a name that resonates with 'hope' in the Sinhala language, has achieved a historic feat as the first Sri Lankan to score a double-century in an ODI. This remarkable achievement, however, is just the climax of a story that began much earlier, deeply rooted in his father, Sunil Silva's unrealized dreams and the steadfast dedication of his family.

Sunil Silva's dream of cricketing glory was never nurtured in his youth, leaving him with a void he yearned to fill through his offspring. It was the birth of Pathum on May 18, 1998, that rekindled Sunil's hope. From the moment Pathum could walk, Sunil embarked on a mission to sculpt his son into a cricketer of world-class stature.

Pathum's early life was not one of privilege but one of persistent struggle. The Silva family, grappling with financial hardships, lived a life far removed from the glitz and glamour of international cricket. Yet, it was in the dusty lanes and modest cricket fields of Kalutara that Pathum's talent blossomed under his father's strict yet loving guidance. Pathum's mother sold flowers to devotees near the Kalutara Temple, and his father, who lacked basic education and faced financial challenges, created a backdrop of struggle and adversity that shaped Pathum's early years. Their residence, a modest abode in Kalutara, stood in stark contrast to the grandeur of the international cricket stadiums where Pathum's destiny would eventually unfold.

Sunil, a groundsman turned junior coach, instilled in his son not just the techniques of the game but the ethos of hard work and perseverance. Academic pursuits took a backseat as cricket became the central focus of Pathum's life. This decision, often contested within the family, was a gamble Sunil was willing to take, driven by a singular vision of seeing his son don the national colors.

Pathum's cricketing journey was bolstered by the mentorship of Sunil Saluwadana, who had previously guided the likes of T.M. Dilshan. Moving to Isipathana College in

Colombo, a school known for its cricketing prowess, Pathum's talent began to shine brighter. His dedication and technical proficiency led him to score over 1000 runs in the 2017 season, a testament to his growing prowess.

His debut in international cricket in March 2021 was marked by ESPNcricinfo's prediction of him being Sri Lanka's next great Test batter. The prediction wasn't misplaced. Pathum's temperament, technical soundness, and ability to adapt were evident from his first match. Mickey Arthur, then head coach, saw in him the future of Sri Lankan cricket, not just in Tests but in all formats.

And then came the monumental innings against Afghanistan, a display of skill, endurance, and mental fortitude that propelled him into the league of extraordinary cricketers. His double-century was a knock that defied expectations, broke stereotypes, and showed the world what sheer willpower can achieve.

As Pathum raised his bat in the stands, his father's eyes glistened with pride. Every early morning training session, sacrifice, and moment of doubt led to this. Pathum's achievement was not just his own but a culmination of his family's unwavering support and sacrifice.

Currently, Pathum Nissanka embodies a symbol of hope and an illustration of the strength of dreams. His ascent from a life marked by struggles to the zenith of international cricket narrates a tale of fervent passion, relentless perseverance, and the indomitable spirit of a family who dared to dream.



Shamar Joseph: Cricket's Unlikely Hero



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

In cricket, where legends often emerge from the manicured grounds of elite academies and affluent clubs, the saga of Shamar Joseph stands apart, shimmering with a unique allure. Hailing from the hidden maroon enclave of Baracara in Guyana, a village as enigmatic and little-known as the mythical Wakanda, Joseph has navigated a remarkable odyssey to the pinnacle of international cricket. Far from the traditional pathways, his journey is

determination and raw talent, unfolding in an environment far removed from the spotlight's glare. Joseph's ascent is a testament to the fact that, sometimes, the most extraordinary tales of success are scripted in the most unexpected settings, bringing a fresh and exhilarating narrative to the world of cricket.

Baracara, accessible only by a two-hour boat ride from New Amsterdam, is a tiny village standing by the Canje Creek in Guyana's North Eastern region. Home to no more than 400 souls, Joseph's astounding achievements thrust this village, where the primary sports were once Dominoes and cricket, into the limelight.

His journey is one of defiance against the odds. As the West Indies clinched a historic Test win against Australia at their 'fortress Gabba', a feat only achieved once since 1988, Baracara's very own son, Shamar Joseph, led the charge. His seven-wicket haul in Brisbane, following an injury setback caused by Mitchell Starc's yorker, has etched his name in the annals of cricketing greats.

What makes Joseph's story remarkable is not just his on-field heroics but the path he traversed to reach there. Less than a year ago, Joseph wasn't even a first-class cricketer. Turn the clock back to 2021, and he was working as a security guard in Berbice. Fast forward to January 2024, and he is a top contender for the ICC's Test Cricketer of the Month honour.

Growing up in Baracara, cricket was more a pastime than a pursuit. Orlando Tanner, Joseph's cousin, reminisces about their childhood days playing 'jungle-land cricket' by the waterfront near Shamar's house. With no luxury of proper cricket balls, they improvised with fruits or melted plastic from bottles.

Their passion for the sport was undeterred by religious constraints. As Seventh-Day Adventist Christians, playing cricket on Saturdays, their holy day, was forbidden. Joseph's adherence to his faith meant he never played youth cricket.

Joseph's leap from a village boy to a cricket sensation is nothing short of a cinematic saga. Damion Vantull, a former Guyanese cricketer-turned-businessman, played a pivotal role in this. Recognising Joseph's potential during a visit to Baracara, Vantull supported him in leaving his security job and pursuing cricket in Georgetown.

In Georgetown, Joseph's talent blossomed. His first delivery in the Muslim Youth Organisation Sports Club practice nets



broke the wicket keeper's hand, a testament to his raw pace and power. His ascent was rapid; within a year, he was part of Guyana's national side, thanks to the intervention of Esuan Crandon, the head coach and brother of Royston Crandon, who had initially brought Vantull to Baracara.

Joseph's story is a beacon of hope for West Indies cricket, where talent often gets lost in the tussle between boards and players. His journey from the remote Baracara to international cricket stardom is a testament to the raw talent in the world's most secluded corners. Talent that doesn't just compete but triumphs against the sport's greats on the first go.

In a region once known for its cricketing might, stories like Joseph's are a reminder of the unexplored potential waiting to be discovered. For the people of Baracara and cricket enthusiasts worldwide, Shamar Joseph is more than a cricketer; he symbolises what can be achieved against all odds. Damion Vantull aptly says, "He won't be satisfied by this one series. He won't be a one-shot wonder." With such determination and skill, the odds are indeed in Joseph's favour.

A Reader's Perspective on Jaffna Monitor's Recent Interview

INTERVIEW



The Heart, Not Temples, the True Abode for Rama Worship:

Maravanpulavu K. Sachithanathan Reveals



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

On January 22nd, coinciding with the inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya by Indian Prime Minister Modi, a worship event was held at the Varadaraja Perumal Temple in Ponnalai, Jaffna. This event, organized by the Siva Senai organization of Sri Lanka, has garnered

To the Editor of Jaffna Monitor,

I write to express deep concerns about the recent publication of an interview with Maravanpulavu K. Sachithanathan titled "The Heart, Not Temples, the True Abode for Rama Worship" in your esteemed magazine's February 1st issue. While the principle of diverse viewpoints is a cornerstone of democratic discourse, the decision to provide a platform to individuals known for their divisive and harmful rhetoric is troubling, especially in a region like Jaffna, which values religious harmony.

Maravanpulavu Sachithanathan is a figure who has gained notoriety for his controversial and often unverified claims, which many perceive as veering toward religious bigotry. He created an organization called 'Siva Senai' in parallel with the ultra-

Hindu organizations of India. His organization's name is also derived from Maharashtra's Shiv Sena, known for multiple instances of religious violence in Maharashtra and across India. His rhetorical claims about the Ram temple and his statement, "During their colonial endeavors in Sri Lanka, the Portuguese demolished revered Hindu temples such as Thiruketheeswaram, Thirukoneswaram, and Thondeeswaram, replacing the latter with a Christian church," raise questions about his motives. Does he intend to demolish that church and build a Hindu temple again? Is he aiming to create religious problems in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka? His narrow-minded thoughts, when disseminated through respected media outlets, run the risk of legitimizing these divisive viewpoints, potentially stoking communal tensions in a society that has worked tirelessly to foster peace and unity among its diverse religious communities.

Furthermore, it is imperative to remember the collective struggle of Sri Lankan Tamils for a separate land. This movement was strengthened by the solidarity and contributions of Tamils from every religious background. Each religion played a pivotal role. Overemphasizing a single religious perspective, as often done by Mr. Sachithanathan, not only undermines this collective effort but also disrespects the diverse contributions of our community.

There are also concerns about Mr. Sachithanathan's potential agenda to stir up religious disharmony in Jaffna. His consistent endeavors in this direction are alarming and counterproductive to the ongoing efforts to maintain peace and communal harmony in the region. Media outlets like yours must be vigilant in not becoming conduits for such divisive agendas.

I urge the Jaffna Monitor to reconsider the implications of giving voice to such controversial figures. The media's role in maintaining communal harmony is paramount. I advocate for a more balanced and inclusive approach in journalism that respects and reflects our society's diverse religious and cultural fabric, contributing towards the peace and unity we all cherish.

Sincerely,
K.Raveendran
Canada.



This article is an expression of the author's personal views and opinions. It does not necessarily reflect the official stance or position of Jaffna Monitor



The Gabba Breach: A Ray of Hope for the Men in Maroon



By:
**Dr. Aravinthan
Arunthavanathan**

If Cricket were a big family, the West Indies would be that uncle who used to be the lifeblood of any party with unparalleled dance moves that caught everyone awestruck; they are that uncle with a great sense of humour who could liven up any dull moment, they are that uncle who had a swagger which others could not even imagine to have.

But today, that uncle is paralysed, immobile, and bedridden.

A mild movement of an eyelid or perhaps a flinch of muscle fibre is good to excite everyone in the family in the hope of the better times of the past returning against all odds.

But reality backed by logic and science would suggest otherwise.

As Shamar Joseph led the West Indies to an unimaginable win at the Gabba in the second Test versus Australia, delivering perhaps an all-time great spell of fast bowling, the whole cricketing fraternity was excited. This excitement stemmed more from admiration for the West Indians and a desperate hope for a West Indian resurgence than animosity towards Australia. Nothing would explain it more than the scenes in the commentary box. One of the Australian stalwarts, Adam Gilchrist, was elated and genuinely celebrating with Brian Lara despite his own team ending up on the wrong side of the equation. Aussie skipper Cummins was warm and gracious, always echoing the cricketing fraternity's thoughts and indirectly hinting that the fanboy

in him couldn't stop getting excited by the win for the men in maroon.

All these observations suggest one clear fact. The cricketing world requires and hopes for the West Indies to come back to life. The flamboyance of their batters, the fire in their bowlers, and the fun index of the men from the Caribbean as a whole, mixed with a plethora of characters, add colour to the game we love. Shamar Joseph's spell at the Gabba or even at Adelaide in his first-ever outing is a testament to the colour they add to the game. The salute to the crowd by the young fast bowler after his five-wicket haul while walking away shows the attitude the men from the Caribbean bring to the game. Imagine a debutant being brave enough to have his own celebratory act and display it to the Aussie crowd. If you know the Australian spectators,



the magnitude of the act will speak for itself.

All that is great. Have we reached the tipping point signalling the revival of Caribbean Cricket? Would the Gabba win turn the tide? You may ask. The answer is perhaps not. That's not pessimism but probabilism. Here's why.

West Indies have often pulled off the unthinkable since their Cricket hit a nadir at the turn of the millennium.

It was an absolute heist for the West Indies to win the 2004 Champions Trophy in England, triumphing over the hosts through the unlikely heroics of Ian Bradshaw and Courtney Brown. In 2012, Marlon Samuels' spectacular performance decimated Malinga's bowling, stunning a packed Premadasa stadium that was nearly poised to celebrate a Sri Lankan

victory in the World T20, especially after the first 10 overs of the West Indies innings. A reality-defying blitz by Carlos Brathwaite topped off another World T20 win for the West Indies in the most dramatic fashion in 2016 at Kolkata.

A Chase-Hope partnership led the fourth inning 322 chase, stunning England at Headingley in 2017, and the list goes on. Each of these had the potential to bring life to our long-lost friends, yet they didn't. It was always a case of a spike of hope followed by plateaued progress and, more often than not, a decline accelerated by controversies in administration. The Gabba is the latest addition to this mind-blowing list. Is it any different? Perhaps not. The reason?

The downfall of the West Indies lies in the





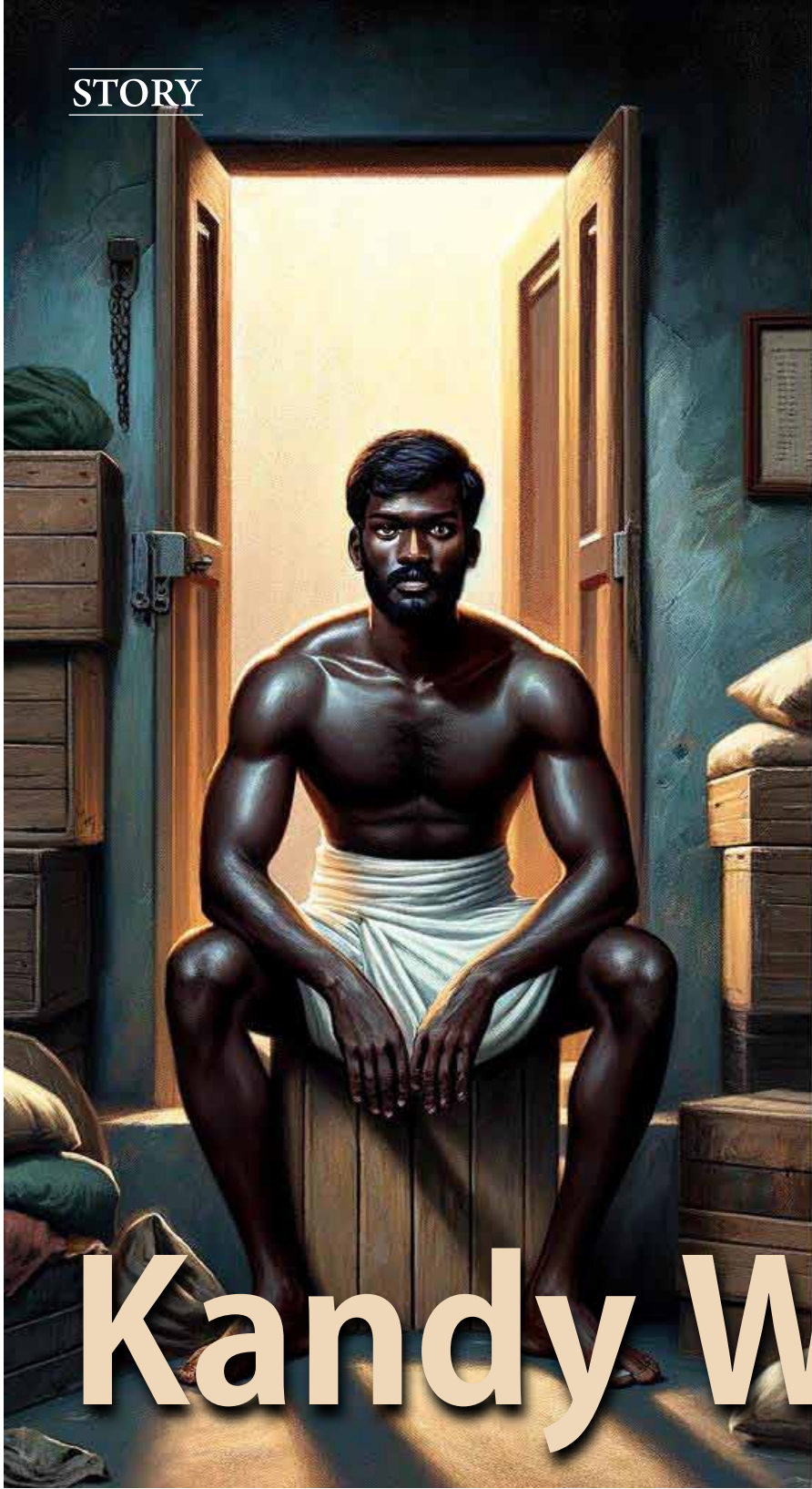
administrative weaknesses, with many individual entities running with varying agendas. Lack of a collective identity, too, is considered a major contributory factor. To make matters worse, the lack of financial muscle makes retention of talent an impossible task in a world of financially lucrative T20 leagues. How they manage Shamar Joseph and preserve him for the Test format and even West Indies Cricket will be a litmus test indicating the sustainability or the potential for any progress in the West Indies. Until this fundamental flaw is corrected, West Indies would painfully remain dormant, much to the disappointment of the cricketing fraternity. Gabba-like wins would occur from time to time and provide hope to fans. But reality would possibly remain the same.

As disappointing as it may be, the ICC has to take the blame, too. It should have seen this coming. Instead, the ICC was focused on the goldmine emerging out of the subcontinent. Lack of focus and inequitable attention resulted in the flare of the men in maroon being lost. A World Cup without the West Indies also became a reality despite being

unimaginable in the years that passed by. That's the level of decline the region everybody adores has gone through. Not only in the West Indies but also in many other casualties. Zimbabwe, Kenya and perhaps Sri Lanka too. If there had been foresight and genuine interest from regional and global administrators, the game would have been far richer in content and quality than it is today.

But as things stand, the Cricketing family's famous uncle is immobile. Like before, on many occasions, he has slightly moved. Perhaps Gabba was more than a move. A smile reminds us how good things were back. Unfortunately, as the underlying fundamentals remain dismantled, the smile would just be transient, and we hope there would be a few more smiles more frequently. Perhaps a few more Gabba-like wins and perhaps a few more Shamar Josephs to instil hope and belief.

Cricket needs West Indies more than West Indies need Cricket. For that, a few more Shamar Josephs and Gabba breaches would infuse much-needed adrenaline to bring back life to the men in maroon.



Kandy Warrior

Translated from the original Tamil
short story *kaṇṭi vīraṇ* (கண்டி வீரன்)
by Shobasakthi

Translated by:
Eluttukkiṇiyavan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

Once upon a time there was a person in Sri Lanka called Kandy Warrior. Apparently, a Tamil militant group had sentenced him to death. It also seems that the same group had later rescinded the sentence. I am not aware of anything more regarding the story of Kandy Warrior.

However, such an event was extremely rare in the history of our struggle. Hardly anyone who was caught by a militant group managed to escape to

freedom. In particular this was the only instance ever where a death sentence was rescinded. From the time I first heard about Kandy Warrior I could not help puzzling over how this came to pass. I was very eager to write the story of Kandy Warrior. But I was not able to even imagine how it might have happened.

Recently I read a short story by Leo Tolstoy called 'Too Dear!' (Дорого стоит) which he adapted from an earlier story by Guy de Maupassant. Ākūr Ānandhāchāriyār had translated it into Tamil with an unusually long title meaning 'who can afford to feed an elephant?' Suddenly it occurred to me that this story that took place in Europe in 1897 possibly resembles Kandy Warrior's story that happened in Sri Lanka in 1984. Tell me, how else could Kandy Warrior have cheated death!

Therefore, permit me to borrow Tolstoy's story and shoehorn Kandy Warrior's saga into it.

Around 1984, it is estimated that there were around thirty-seven armed Tamil militant groups, big and small, in Sri Lanka. The tiniest among the thirty-seven was called 'Revolutionary Organization of Socialist Tamil Eelam.' For the sake of brevity, they referred to themselves as ROSTE.

There were only six members in that group. Every one of them was in the twenty-to thirty-year-old range. The group's Revolutionary Executive Central Committee consisted of all six.

ROSTE advertised itself as a movement on the extreme left of the political spectrum. Its political project was to rally farmers and workers to mount a continuous guerilla war against the Sri Lankan military to establish Tamil Eelam as a separate socialist country.

At the time the Indian army was training many Eelam Tamil militant groups. Leading political figures in the state of Tamil Nadu in India, M.G.R and Karuṇānidhi, were competing with one another to provide funds for these groups. But ROSTE had resolved, as a matter of doctrine, that ROSTE would not rely on India. Every month, their Central Committee would pass motions to resolve that they would not use Tamil Nadu as base, and that their movement would be nurtured only on Eelam soil.

Despite being a tiny militant movement of merely six people. ROSTE firmly believed that theirs was the one fighting with a firm ideological foundation on the right path towards Tamil Eelam. ROSTE was second to none in publishing calls to action from time to time. It also invited other Tamil militant groups to ideological debates. When the armed military operations of other groups failed, ROSTE did extensive research as to why those operations failed militarily and published their conclusions as political pamphlets. Without fail, all those pamphlets ended with 'When the people's revolutionary army of ROSTE begins its military operations, it will result in great victories.' Nevertheless, one must say that ROSTE received absolutely no support from the public. Members of ROSTE struggled to put food on their plates.

The ROSTE movement camped out in a small village eight kilometers from Jaffna town. A dilapidated large stone mansion surrounded by high walls served as their camp. The owners of the house were in America. Therefore, ROSTE occupied the house without succumbing to any guilty conscience. The village had a small high street with four kiosks. People always milled about on the high street, talking politics. ROSTE levied taxes on those high street shops. Because



shopkeepers had to pay taxes for multiple armed groups, ROSTE's share was indeed minuscule. Still ROSTE managed to scrimp and save from the two-rupee or five-rupee taxes they collected, by sometimes half starving themselves and imposing the self-discipline of rationing only four cigarettes per person every day. This way, ROSTE had managed to save two thousand rupees by then.

One evening, while they were out collecting

their tax on the high street, they saw a mob of people beating up a petty thief who had been caught red-handed. The thief was tall, had a strong constitution, and had the complexion of a palmyra tree. His googly eyes were bloodshot. He was wearing a white sarong and a purple shirt. Despite all the beating, the thief remained silent, rooted to the spot where he was standing.

ROSTE intervened and rescued the thief from



the mob. They removed his shirt and used it to blindfold him. They borrowed a piece of jute rope from a shop to tie his hands behind his back. That was in fact the first time people on the high street had seen ROSTE in an operation. Only when ROSTE went out to collect taxes the next day did they realize that this operation had raised their esteem in the eyes of the people.

ROSTE marched the thief to their camp for further interrogation. A green vehicle belonging to a larger militant group came

by. The leader of that group asked, “What is the problem?” One of the ROSTE members responded stiffly, “Comrade, we have taken responsibility for this problem, we will take care of it.”

Once at the camp, the thief was made to sit on the floor, surrounded by the members of the Central Committee. The interrogation proceeded, with the Central Committee throwing question after question at the thief. The entire interrogation was earnestly recorded in a register.

They learned that the thief was from Kandy. His name was Kānthirājan. The group did not like this name in the first place. Therefore, they called him by referring to his hometown, 'Kandy.' They referred to him by this name in the interrogation report.

In contrast to his stoic silence when he was being beaten on the high street, he was garrulous in front of the Central Committee. He liked the discipline and the refined interrogation practices of ROSTE. The members of ROSTE, sitting around him, listened to his exploits with gaping mouths.

He was born in an estate in Kandy, a descendant of people who had fled to escape famine in the Sivagaṅgai region of Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon. When he was ten, he was taken to a home in Jaffna as domestic help. Astonishingly, his employers had also called him 'Kandy.'

Kānthirājan's life of crime began when, at fifteen, he dropped a rock on the lady of the house that employed him, stole a little money, and fled to Kandy. Thereafter, his trajectory went through Colombo, Galle, Vavūniyā, and so on. There was no town that he did not wander into, no mischief he did not get up to, no fight he did not get into, no whore he did not bed, no police beating he did not endure, and no jailhouse he did not get thrown into.

Eventually, he ended up as a gangster for the Kandy drug dealer *kudu bāss*. He hung around in the area behind the Kandy railway station, known for retail drug trade. His job was to watch out for the police or the agents from the Division of Narcotic Control in disguise. Whenever fighting broke out between the gangsters of Sivam *nānā*, another drug dealer, and the gangsters of *kudu bāss*, Kānthirājan was the first to jump into the fray on behalf of *kudu bāss*. He had the strength to down a man with a single blow.

There was a revolutionary party in Kandy. The party had its small trade union. The leader of this trade union was Raṇasiri. When Thaṇabālaśingam *mudalāli* asked *kudu bāss* to rattle this trade union leader a little, *kudu bāss* sent Kānthirājan's to do the job. Kānthirājan went alone to the union leader's house, threatened to kill him, and returned. There were many witnesses who saw him utter the threat. A couple of nights later, union leader Raṇasiri's dead body was found on the street, killed by stabbing.

Kānthirājan tried to convince *kudu bāss* that he did not murder the union leader. But *kudu bāss* just swore at him, showering him with obscenities. Shortly thereafter, *kudu bāss* absconded. The police were on a manhunt to find Kānthirājan who promptly escaped to Jaffna. The police's jurisdiction did not extend to Jaffna. This was the time when the police, fearful of the various militant movements, were closing down police stations in Jaffna. There were a few places in Jaffna frequented by intelligence officers. They, too, were periodically gunned down by the militant groups. Thereafter, Kānthirājan earned a living via petty theft.

ROSTE recorded Kānthirājan's confessions to the letter. Behind the main house that served as the camp, there was a small room by the rear wall within the same compound. Perhaps it was built as the servants' quarters. ROSTE imprisoned Kānthirājan in this room, designated one of their members to stand guard outside, and the remaining five analyzed and debated Kānthirājan's confessions in detail.

There were a number of charges against Kānthirājan: violence, theft, thuggery, unbridled sexual relations, drug trafficking, and premeditated murder. The consensus within ROSTE was that he was an antisocial person beyond any reasonable doubt.

Therefore, in accordance with the rules of their movement at that time, they sentenced him to death. It was decided that he would be tied to the lamp post on the high street and shot to death.

When the sentence was announced to Kānthirājan, he protested “This is unjust *sāmi*, how can you punish me for a murder I did not commit?” Yet, there was no appeal to the death sentence that ROSTE had passed. Generally, they deliberated at length before making a decision. But once a decision is made, they stood by it firmly.

But there was a complication in carrying out the death sentence. ROSTE did not own a gun they can use to shoot Kānthirājan. They decided to seek help from another militant group that was militarily better endowed. They sent a request to this group asking what it would cost to rent a gun for a day and purchase two bullets.

The other movement responded that they could not rent out a gun, but they could send a gun along with an expert gunman drawn from their ranks who could do the job cleanly and that this would cost ROSTE ten thousand rupees.

ROSTE was shocked to learn this. Why should they spend ten thousand rupees on account of this Kandy murderer? Where on earth would they find ten thousand in the first place? Could they not carry out the sentence more cheaply? They debated these questions at length.

They conjectured that the first group that they had approached had capitalist leanings, which explained the unreasonably exorbitant amount they greedily demanded. Besides, they also noted that this movement generally did not respect ROSTE. Therefore, the Central Committee decided to approach a leftist group

in the belief that they would accord greater respect to ROSTE's request. They then sent a request for help to a left-leaning group which also had plenty of arms.

This left-leaning group said they would charge five thousand rupees to send a comrade with a gun. They also said that if ROSTE only wanted to rent the gun, it would cost three thousand in rent, but would require a further six thousand as deposit. ROSTE could not afford this either. In the dire financial situation they were in, how could they justify spending so much money on a murderer? If they in fact had that kind of money, they could have started their own newspaper. With thoughts like these, once again they focused on researching how they could carry out the death sentence economically, staying within their means.

They wondered if they could implement the death sentence in some other way, thereby avoiding all this messing around with guns. When someone proposed stabbing with a knife, the majority in the Central Committee objected that it was an inhuman practice dating from the days of barbarism. Killing by beating was ruled out, not so much because none of the group members had enough courage to attempt it, but rather because Kānthirājan was not frail enough to die when he was beaten. His body was like steel. Death by poisoning was also rejected by a majority in the Central Committee. That is the style of coup makers and conspirators. No revolutionary organization will ever resort to poisoning.

Finally, the Central Committee came to the firm conclusion that they would just buy their own inexpensive gun, even if it was rickety or second hand. On further inquiry, it transpired that even ancient guns from the Paṇḍaravaṇṇiyaṇ era were not available for less than four thousand rupees. Where would

they go for that kind of money! Even foregoing food to scrimp and save from the meager taxes they collect from the small high street would still take them another two full years to collect that amount. Could they continue to pay for the care of this Kandy murderer until then?

ROSTE's rule book stated that prisoners need to be fed thrice a day and given tea twice a day. They could also get an oil bath once a week. First the prisoner was given four cigarettes each day. Thereafter, on the request of the prisoner, cigarettes were replaced by a bundle of *beedis*.

Like clockwork and without fail, food from the ROSTE camp kitchen was taken to the room where Kānthirājan was held. Having eaten well thrice a day without having to exert himself, Kānthirājan had noticeably put on weight within a month. There was a new shine to his skin. He led a cushy life, sleeping comfortably and enjoying smokes when he was not sleeping. At the end of the month, when the Central Committee inspected their accounts, they discovered that holding the prisoner had cost them about a thousand rupees. The Central Committee was utterly shaken once again.

They started to agonize again as to how to compensate for this loss of funds and how to reduce the expenses of holding a prisoner. There was



consternation at the thought that this Kandy murderer from nowhere was consuming ROSTE's hard-earned tax revenue from the people. They even entertained the idea of freeing the prisoner. But they hesitated, as rescinding the death sentence of an antisocial character without cause would amount to a doctrinal deviation.

It was then that one of the members put forward a good solution.

“Now we take turns guarding him day and night. Going forward, we don't need to guard him.”

“But if there is no guard, he will escape.”

“Let him escape! With that, the curse on us will be lifted, too... What do we stand to lose if he runs away? The movement will save money.”

From the next day onwards, the guard in front of Kānthirājan's room was removed, and the door was left open. At mealtime, when no food showed up, Kānthirājan shouted for food. It did not look like anyone heard him.

Hunger gnawed at Kānthirājan. He stepped out of his prison

room slowly, looked around, and walked over to the camp to ask for food. When he was given food, he walked back to the prison room to eat it and go to sleep. The same sequence repeated in the following days. He went to the camp thrice a day to ask for food, tea, and *beedis* and returned to the room to consume them. He was enjoying life. It did not look as if he had any intention of escaping.

Differences in opinion within the Central Committee began to emerge, lamenting “For how long can we put up with this wretch?” The person who made the suggestion for removing the prison guard also took on the responsibility for handling this problem. He said, “If we wait passively for him to escape, it will not come to pass; we have to trick him into escaping.”

He casually strolled towards the room where the prisoner was imprisoned. Inside, the prisoner sat cross-legged, happily smoking a *beedi*. When he saw a ROSTE member approach, he hurriedly put out his *beedi* by squelching it on the ground, stuck the extinguished *beedi* behind his ear, and stood up respectfully. The visitor started chatting.

“What is up, you look as if you are feeling down today. You must be missing your wife and kids.”

“Let them be, *sāmi*. Asses!”

“Why are you so hard on them? They must be distressed, not having seen you for so long.”

“It will be difficult for them if I am there.. Now they have peace of mind.”

“Somehow, I pity you. Even though you say this, I am sure you want to see your wife and children. You have not been guarded for a while. Why don’t you run away? If you need money for the bus, I will give it to you. I will

also persuade my comrades not to come after you.”

The prisoner sat down again cross-legged. He then lit a *beedi* as he talked.

“That wouldn’t be right, *sāmi*. You removed the guard because you trusted me. How can I betray your trust?”

“It is no betrayal, Kandy. We won’t worry if you run away.”

“Where can I run away to *sāmi*? The whole world knows that you sentenced me to death. Who will employ me now? How will I survive, tell me?”

The ROSTE member was at his wit’s end. He started to walk back to the camp. The prisoner called out behind him:

“*Sāmi*, please shut the door behind you.”

By now it was crystal clear to the Central Committee that the prisoner had no intention of escaping. Once again, they strained their brains and came up with a solution. The decision was that no matter the cost—even if it meant pawning one of their own heads—they must immediately acquire a gun to carry out the death sentence.

In those days it was routine for militant groups to carry out bank robberies. ROSTE too decided to rob a bank to buy a gun with which they could get rid of the prisoner.

They chose a small rural bank as their target, and meticulously planned the robbery. They drew up detailed maps. There was only one guard at the rural bank. Before ten in the morning, there was hardly any human traffic in the bank or the street it was located in. The metal gate of the bank always remained closed. The guard stood behind the gate



holding a long staff. He first interrogated each visitor, allowed only one person in at a time, and closed the gate behind them. Only after the previous visitor exited the bank would he admit the next one.

Members of ROSTE would drive to the bank at nine in the morning, pretending to be intelligence officers in civil garb. Asserting, ‘One of the bank employees is a terrorist suspect, we have come to arrest him,’ they would enter the bank and proceed to burgle it. That was the plan.

The primary flaw in this plan was that the bank guard would be deceived only if a purported intelligence officer was able to speak to the guard in Sinhala. But no one in ROSTE could speak Sinhala. After a day of intense debate, the Central Committee resolved to incorporate the prisoner Kānthirājan into the plan because he could speak Sinhala flawlessly. Besides, his height and build made him a very plausible intelligence officer. Scarcity and hunger had made ROSTE members look malnourished

weaklings compared to the dazzling appearance of Kānthirājan.

On the planned day, ROSTE rented a car to take them to the rural bank. Kānthirājan, smartly dressed, led the way, followed by three members of ROSTE. Another acted as the getaway driver and kept the engine of the car running.

During his career, Kānthirājan had encountered more than his share of intelligence officers and interrogations. So, he could play the role of a senior intelligence official to perfection. Only when they neared the bank did they notice that the guard had a gun.

The three ROSTE members behind Kānthirājan began to falter when they saw the gun, their legs turning to jelly. They gaped at one another as if to ask, “Should we run away?” The intelligence they had gathered from their earlier reconnaissance was indeed flawless. How could they have known that, just the previous day, the escalating bank robberies in the North had prompted the government to issue older repeater rifles even to the guards at rural banks?

But Kānthirājan maintained his confident stride even after seeing the gun. He marched up to the guard, and swiftly raised his right hand to his chest. Startled, the guard snapped to a proper salute. When senior officers meet someone junior in the forces, they usually offer a grudging, half-hearted salute, hand raised to their chest. When Kānthirājan barked out a couple of words in Sinhala, the iron gate opened wide. As soon as he entered through the gate, Kānthirājan grabbed the guard’s gun by his left hand while slapping his cheek hard with his right. The guard fainted and collapsed. Kānthirājan held the gun aloft and beckoned to the ROSTE members to follow him. They scuttled behind him, with

Kānthirājan leading them into the bank.

There was hardly anything in the bank. An exhaustive search only yielded a hundred or so rupees in chump change. They grabbed what they could and escaped, with Kānthirājan sitting smartly in the front seat of the car. They abandoned the car next to a deserted beach and walked back to the camp. When they reached the camp, Kānthirājan retreated to his room carrying the gun. ROSTE members, watching this, gulped.

The credit for absconding with the gun was entirely Kānthirājan’s. It rankled ROSTE to acknowledge that they had played absolutely no role in it. In fact, the bitter truth was that ROSTE members were prepared to run away as soon as they saw the gun-wielding guard. Therefore legitimately, Kānthirājan was the rightful new owner of the gun.

But ROSTE thought that it was dangerous to leave such an antisocial criminal in possession of a gun. Besides, how could they sleep peacefully knowing that their prisoner had a gun. How could they be certain that he would not bump them off in their mats as they slept? Furthermore, they needed a gun urgently. It was what could help them carry out the death sentence against Kānthirājan. Therefore, the Central Committee resolved to confiscate the gun from him.

The six members of the Central Committee prepared themselves for any eventuality and marched to the prison room. Kānthirājan sat squatting on the floor with the gun disassembled and laid out before him.

“This is a really ancient gun, *sāmi*. It is not in a usable condition. It should be oiled and repaired if we want to make use of it.”

“Kandy, do you know how to take apart a gun and put it back together?”

“Yes, I know *sāmi*. I have gone hunting with my friends.”

The Central Committee returned to the camp. Seeing the gun disassembled and spread out on the floor in so many pieces eroded any confidence they had in using it. They proceeded to debate late into the night, sacrificing sleep. At four in the morning, their camp was surrounded by another militant group.

This other group was a big one. It did not like competing groups. It planned to attack and eliminate such groups when the opportunity arose. The big group could not tolerate the fact that ROSTE carried out a bank robbery. Therefore, they had come to the ROSTE camp with the intention of banning ROSTE. Because they were fully aware of ROSTE’s ‘strength,’ a mere four people had shown up. Two of them carried modern guns.

Even at that juncture, ROSTE was ready to negotiate. But that was not the style of the big group. They had got ROSTE’s Central Committee to strip down to their underwear and had them kneel against the wall. They only spoke in obscenities. One ROSTE member was slapped hard on his cheek. His scream was heard throughout the village. Finally, the ROSTE Central Committee spoke in one voice:

“Brothers, ban us if you will, but do not disgrace us like this.”

Hearing this the fighters from the big group laughed out aloud. They also took pity on the plight of ROSTE. Right then, two loud explosions were heard. The two armed members of the big group collapsed one after the other, with gunshot wounds on their foreheads. Because the remaining two could not tell where the fire was coming from, they

disappeared like a flash into the night. Such was their training.

Kānthirājan, having sniped from the darkness through the open window, entered the room with his gun drawn. Everyone in ROSTE realized that the big group would show up in a matter of minutes and annihilate ROSTE. No matter to which corner of this country ROSTE would run to, they knew that the big group would follow them and obliterate ROSTE.

Kānthirājan told them to get dressed again, and they obeyed him without a word. Holding the gun, he led them out of the back entrance, and through the village fields. By the time they reached a coastal fisherfolk village, dawn was beginning to break.

Kānthirājan went to the fishermen to ask for help. He explained that they were a rebel group and that they needed a speedboat urgently. The fishermen came forward eagerly to help. Immediately a boat captain was found, and a speedboat with two fifty-five horsepower engines was also readied. Carrying the ROSTE Central Committee and Kānthirājan, the speedboat quickly disappeared over the horizon into the open sea.

Only when the land receded from sight did the members of ROSTE breathe easy. The speedboat was galloping over the waves, spraying everyone wet. Kānthirājan was busy trying to light a soaked *beedi*. One member of ROSTE asked, “Kandy, where are we going now?”

“We can head to Sivagaṅgai *sāmi*; I have a ton of relatives in that area. No problem,” said Kānthirājan.

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