

# THE PEACE TRAP

**An Indo-Sri Lankan Political Crisis**

**P.S. SURYANARAYANA**



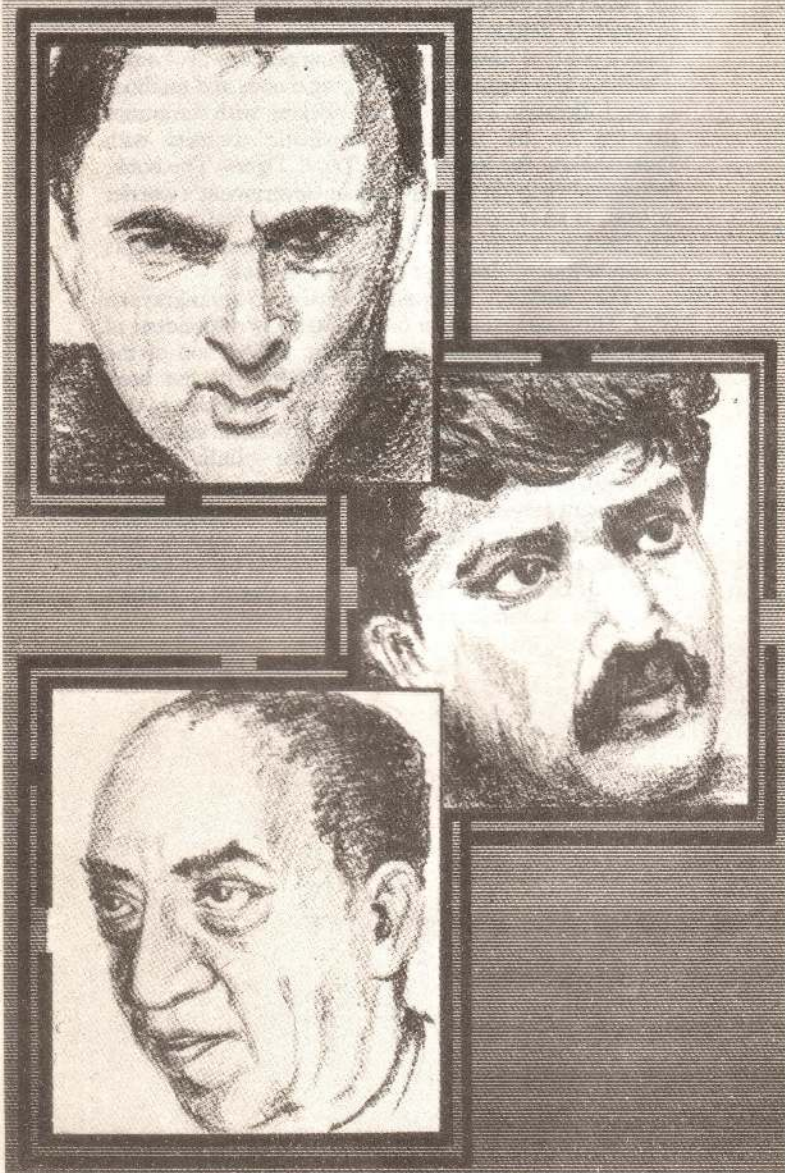


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*The Peace Trap* is a candid portrait of the political storm which is still raging around the Indo-Sri Lankan accord of July 29, 1987. The continuing crisis in implementing the accord is presented against a background of the issues and personalities involved. The 'peace trap' is, in itself, a delightful new expression that summarises India's political dilemmas in bringing peace to Sri Lanka. The book also captures the changing moods and methods of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, with the author drawing on his intimate journalistic contacts with Prabhakaran, the leader of the Tamil Tigers. The book, focussing briefly on the Sri Lankan Government's worries as well, is an introductory work by a political journalist who has been a witness to some of the major developments in contemporary Indo-Sri Lankan relations.

The author, Pisupati Sadasiva Suryanarayana (P.S. Suryanarayana) is a Senior Staff Correspondent of the *Financial Express*, an important publication of the Indian Express group. Based in Madras, he has been covering political and economic events on a day-to-day basis. He visited Sri Lanka to study the political and ethnic crisis there. Born in Salem (Tamil Nadu — India) on July 15, 1949, Suryanarayana gave up a prestigious Indian government service job in 1976 to plunge into the exciting world of daily journalism. He worked as a reporter with the *Indian Express* and *The Hindu* in Madras before joining the *Financial Express*. He has a Master's degree in Politics and Public Administration (Madras University).



*Three in a trap.*

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An Indo-Sri Lankan Political Crisis

P.S. SURYANARAYANA

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*Dedicated to the memory of all the Indians  
and Sri Lankans — both Tamils and  
Sinhalese — who lost their lives in the tragic  
sequence of events that have taken place  
in Sri Lanka since 1983.*



## Foreword

ON the face of it, India's embroilment in Sri Lanka's internal ethnic conflict that has been raging for years now has all the ingredients of an existential nightmare. Choices are not choices but traps. The protagonists are not freemen but prisoners — of their past, of the politics in their own backyards, of the fear of their rivals. Every turning point has but led to a dead end and every solution to an impasse.

To take but the latest phase: How did a peace-keeping force become overnight a war-making force? Why did India, for years casting itself in the role of the friend of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, despite the obvious risk of being branded a meddler in some other country's internal affairs, turn overnight into an enemy of the Tamils? How did the protector of the Tigers, a reputation that antagonised Sinhalese opinion in Sri Lanka, suddenly find itself in the role of a ruthless destroyer of the Tigers?

There is both irony and tragedy in this turn of events. Conspiracy theories abound about India's hegemonistic designs and Jayewardene's deviousness in tricking India into a Catch-22 situation. But these miss the point that the tragedy is all the more poignant because it is not wicked but decent people that have pushed themselves into an intolerable situation.

Suryanarayana's extremely readable and perceptive book is titled *The Peace Trap* with a nice sense of paradox. His central theme is that all the three sides, Rajiv Gandhi, Jayewardene and Prabhakaran — or more formally, the Indian Government, the Sri Lankan Government and the L.T.T.E. — have, in the pursuit of instant peace, fallen into traps of their own devising. More particularly, the peace process has been turned into a war process, with India trapped into an extra-territorial role it probably never bargained for.

The Sri Lankan strife has been, particularly in the post-accord period, subjected to a barrage of misinformation and disinformation by the different parties to it. The great merit of Suryanarayana's book is that he has no axe of any kind to grind, something that cannot be confidently asserted of every journalist who has reported or commented on it. Suryanarayana has visited the areas affected after the Peace-Keeping Force landed in the island and spoken to a wide cross-section of the people. He has also had the inestimable advantage of knowing rather well Prabhakaran, who interacted with him with a certain amount of candour during his long exile in Madras. All this has given a rare authenticity to Suryanarayana's narrative of events and an even more exceptional authority to his analysis and conclusions.

I warmly commend the book to everyone interested in the subject.

*Indian Express*  
New Delhi  
13 April, 1988.

N.S. JAGANNATHAN

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## Acknowledgement

Cover and Frontispiece by Anuradha Rajagopalan

# Illustrations

*Three in a trap.*

Frontispiece

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*Signing their way into history: the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi (left) and the Sri Lankan President, Junius Richard Jayewardene, affixing their signatures on the official texts of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord in Colombo on July 29, 1987.*

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*The two leaders exchange pleasantries and the accord documents.*

*A media show of arms surrender: Yogi (left foreground), a ranking leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, handed over a pistol, signalling their readiness to give up weapons. At the ceremony at Palali airport in Sri Lanka on August 5, 1987, the Sri Lankan Defence Secretary, Gen. A. S. Attygalle (right foreground) accepted the pistol.*

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*Prabhakaran with the fasting Thileepan who sacrificed his life in the protest fast against India's role in Sri Lanka.*

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*A girls contingent of the Liberation Tigers celebrating the capture of an Indian armed vehicle in the Indo-Tiger war.*

*Lt. Gen. Depinder Singh (left), formerly General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Indian Army's Southern Command, and the overall commander of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in Sri Lanka, being briefed on the logistics of 'Operation Parwan' in the early stages of the Indo-Tiger war in 1987.*

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*Soldiers of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force training their weapons on suspected hide-outs of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The I.P.K.F. is made up mainly of soldiers and officers drawn from the Indian Army. While necessary support is provided by the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy, units of the (Indian) Central Reserve Police Force, including women cadres, are also on duty in the Sri Lankan Tamil territory.*

*Facsimile of the front cover of an issue of 'Pörkkural' (or 'War Cry'), an internal publication of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.*

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*Velupillai Prabhakaran (left), Supreme Commander of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, with his political adviser, Anton Stanislaus Balasingam. The photo was taken at the Tigers' office in Madras (India) well before the Indo-Sri Lankan accord of July 1987.*

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*Prabhakaran (right foreground) with Sathasivam Krishnakumar alias Kittu (left foreground), former regional commander of the Tigers in Jaffna.*

*The former Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi (left) greeting Appapillai Amirthalingam and his wife in New Delhi. The photo was taken some time before the outbreak of ethnic violence in Sri Lanka in 1983. Amirthalingam is still the leader of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front.*

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## Preface

**F**OREIGN policy is a political fine art. Celebrating forty years of freedom at present, India is yet to master the modern nuances of this fine art. The first, and perhaps the most distinguished, Prime Minister, the late Jawaharlal Nehru, began with a burst of creativity in the early 1950s. Teaming with Tito of Yugoslavia and Nasser of Egypt, Nehru envisioned non-alignment as a model foreign policy for the newly independent countries in general and India in particular. In simple terms, non-alignment denotes a general desire to steer clear of the power politics of the latter-day superpowers of the twentieth century, namely, the United States of America and the Soviet Union.

Nehru's policy was widely acknowledged across the world, but India itself was respected as no more than a preacher, with little or no capacity to impose its sense of political morality on the rest of the world. And when India was badly outwitted by China in the Himalayan war of 1962, Delhi lost its momentum on the world stage.

It was only much later, in 1971 to be precise, that Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, a Prime Minister in her own right, proclaimed India's political primacy in the South Asian region. By refusing to buckle to pressure from the U.S., she liberated East Pakistan and created Bangladesh — receiving the active political support of the other superpower, the U.S.S.R., in this venture.

As a result, the world witnessed India's first and decisive stirrings as a regional superpower. But Morarji Desai, who came to power as Prime Minister in 1977, when Indira Gandhi lost a general election, pursued other ideas vigorously. He outlined a new neighbourhood policy of absolute friendship towards all the countries in the region. His critics saw it as a needless appeasement of the smaller countries which

surround India. The policy itself was later blurred by the Indian domestic political crisis of 1978-79.

When Indira Gandhi staged a spectacular return to power in 1980, she immediately picked up the foreign policy threads from where she had left off in 1977. Eventually, in late July 1983, just over a year before she was assassinated, Indira Gandhi signalled to Sri Lanka, India's southern neighbour, that its political-ethnic crisis would be of utmost concern to Delhi itself. She even forced the Sri Lankan President, Junius Richard Jayewardene, to accept India's *locus standi* in his country's internal affairs.

In fact, it is this aspect which her son, Rajiv Gandhi, inherited when he succeeded her as the Prime Minister in 1984. But he went further. After quite a few false steps, besides some firm policy moves, Rajiv Gandhi finally signed the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of July 29, 1987.

*Prima facie*, the pact was a testament to India's status as a regional superpower. Under the accord, India proudly agreed to disarm the Sri Lankan Tamil militant-separatist guerillas. Delhi's other commitments included a guarantee of Sri Lanka's continued existence as an indivisible country.

The basic idea was to bring peace to the trouble-torn island which was in the throes of a virtual civil war between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. In return for this assignment of its own choice, India would, of course, derive some geo-political gains and stamp its authority as a regional superpower. This was the general tenor of the agreement.

On paper, all this was very impressive indeed, from Delhi's point of view. But, as India began to translate the fine print of the agreement into a field reality, Rajiv Gandhi gradually found himself in a peace trap — almost inexorably.

What is a peace trap? To my mind, it is a delightful new term that summarises India's political dilemmas in bringing peace to Sri Lanka. It also captures Delhi's sense of painful inability to implement the agreement quickly.

India will now have to blame itself for not having visualised the pitfalls on the path to peace in Sri Lanka. At the same time, Delhi's dilemmas can also be partly traced to the changing moods and methods of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

As the premier group of armed Sri Lankan Tamil separatists, the Tigers have not accepted the Indo-Sri Lankan accord of July 1987 at all. Interestingly, the tenacious leader of the Liberation Tigers, Velupillai Prabhakaran, sees the accord itself as a trap set for him, in the name of solving the Sri Lankan Tamil problem through peaceful means.

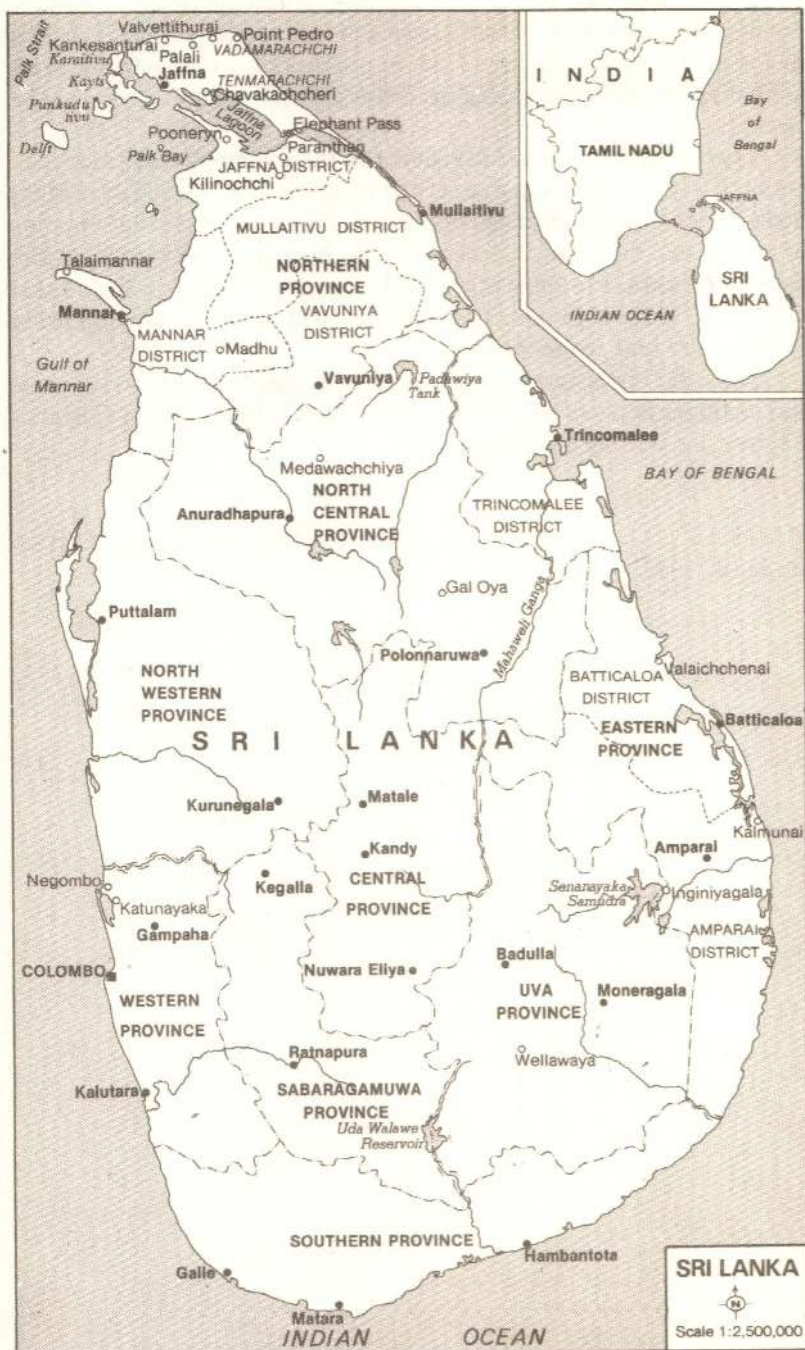
At the other end of the Sri Lankan political spectrum, President Jayewardene also suffers from a trap syndrome. He feels he is caught in a trap of his own making — the trap of asking India to bring peace to his country, without realising the limits of Delhi's power in the peculiar circumstances.

I have tried to outline and analyse this three-dimensional peace trap, with the focus on the dilemmas of India and the Liberation Tigers. This book is by no means an exhaustive work. Primarily, it is a presentation of events and their consequences as seen by a political journalist who has been a witness to some of the major developments. It is hoped that the book, written in journalistic style, will serve as an important introductory and reference work.

I take this opportunity to thank Shri N.S. Jagannathan, a well-known and distinguished journalist who was till recently the Editor of *Financial Express*, for writing the Foreword.

MADRAS  
10 April, 1988

P. S. SURYANARAYANA



# 1

## Touchdown for friendship

**S**UN-KISSED Sri Lanka is a small but splendid island, now adrift in a sea of political troubles.

Its coastal capital, Colombo, commands a marvellous view of the Indian Ocean, a view no major Indian city enjoys. Colombo may turn into an important port of call in a utopian 'zone of peace', if India succeeds in its campaign for the international recognition of Indian Ocean as a sanctuary of peace. But the people of Sri Lanka are not amused at such a positional nicety of Colombo on the lap of the Indian Ocean.

In fact, many Sri Lankans, mostly Sinhalese, resent their proximity to India. They feel ill at ease in the Indian political shadow. Some even say Sri Lanka is at India's feet, not merely as a quirk of geography but as a fact of geo-politics.

This view is not readily echoed in India. Many Indians blame the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, for messing up the country's foreign policy objectives in Sri Lanka. Yet, they are no less concerned about the geo-political calculus.

Geo-politics is a term used to describe the political developments that are traceable to the geographical location of a place or country, say, for instance, Sri Lanka, which was formerly known as Ceylon. Its location must make some sense for the political strategies of the two global superpowers, namely the United States and the Soviet Union, or, indeed, the strategies of one or the other of the regional superpowers.

India has, over a period of several years, emerged as one such regional superpower. The Sri Lankan President, Junius Richard Jayewardene, recently acknowledged this fact. His recognition of India as the South Asian superpower forms the basis of the agreement he signed with Rajiv Gandhi in Colombo on July 29, 1987. As a shorthand, we shall refer to this agreement variously as the July accord or agreement or pact.

Remember, Lenin's famous Bolshevik revolution of 1917 is sometimes simply referred to as the October revolution.

Through the July accord, made at the will of the ageing Jayewardene, who is well past 80, the Sri Lankan Government conceded to India a decisive say in the island's political affairs. It is this aspect which still rankles in the minds of the Sinhalese as well as the worried minds of quite a few Sri Lankan Tamils. They feel uneasy that the President himself should have given India such a sweeping stake in the island's political evolution, especially on the question of a new Tamil province and democratic elections there. To them, it is now a topsy-turvy situation, because Jayewardene had earlier accused India of meddling in Sri Lankan politics. He had consistently berated India of godfathering the island's Tamil 'terrorists'.

Yet, being clever at diplomatic doublespeak, Jayewardene anticipated this charge of taking a U-turn in his attitude towards India. So, he invited the Indian military force to his country, giving it a mandate to disarm the Tamil 'terrorists', notably the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. These Tigers are a valiant guerilla group of young men and women led by Velupillai Prabhakaran.

After a hesitant start, India, in turn, accepted the mandate very seriously, going well beyond Jayewardene's early expectations on this sensitive issue. India has, in doing so, gone to war with the Tigers.

For his part, in extending the invitation to the Indian armed force, the Sri Lankan President was clearly looking for an immediate political gain. There was certainly more to his invitation than met the eye. The subtle nuances will be discussed later.

Jayewardene wanted India to put down the Sri Lankan Tamil 'terrorists' so that they could not carve out of the island itself a new, sovereign and separate nation-state of Tamil Eelam. After all, as a leader of the Sinhalese, who traditionally constitute the vast majority of the Sri Lankan population, he has had a long political track record of opposing Tamil nationalism on the island.

Who are these Sri Lankan Tamils? They are not to be confused with those called Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka; the latter toil on the plantations in the same island. These Indian, or plantation, Tamils were first transported to Sri Lanka from India when imperial Britain ruled both the countries. In contrast, the Sri Lankan Tamils believe that their ancestors pre-dated the Sinhalese settlers by a few centuries even before the Christian era began.

Legend and myth have it that even the Sri Lankan aborigines, not to speak of the ancestors of the Sinhalese themselves, had migrated to

the island from India. There is a speculative theory that the ancient Tamil migrants would have made their way to the island when it was still linked to mainland India through a thin land corridor. The surrounding sea later eroded the corridor, thereby making an island out of the land mass of Sri Lanka. Today, the narrow Palk Strait separates Sri Lanka from India, by fracturing what was once a thin strip of connecting land.

Traditionally, the more strident group among the Sri Lankan Tamils, namely the Jaffna Tamils, have made their living in the northern parts of the island, just a few nautical miles away from the Indian State of Tamil Nadu. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is considerable ethnic affinity between the Tamils inhabiting the Indian mainland and the Sri Lankan Tamils. Nonetheless, for historical reasons, there is no symbiotic cultural kinship between the people of Tamil Nadu and the Sri Lankan Tamils. They are not Siamese twins. This factor has enormous political significance as we will see later.

The Tamils of Sri Lanka, badly outnumbered by the Sinhalese over the centuries, boast a proud history of their own. They fashioned it on the very same island which they have 'shared' with the Sinhalese. But, despite their 'co-existence' with the Sinhalese over at least two millennia, the Sri Lanka Tamils recently developed a yearning for a separate political identity. The clamour for political exclusiveness and social equality with the Sinhalese assumed a strident tone soon after Sri Lanka became a free country on February 4, 1948. Earlier, in the colonial period, the inter-racial relations had not gone badly out of hand.

The first spark of the latent Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism was lit when, in 1956, the Sinhalese language was ordained as the country's only 'official language'. The spark became an all-consuming fire of nationalism in 1983, when it was fuelled by the tragic deaths of Tamils in cruel proportions at the hands of Sinhalese chauvinists.

Whatever the immediate provocation, the Sinhalese mobs, while taking on the Sri Lankan Tamils, have always acted under the spell of a political-cultural schizophrenia. Though they stalk the island as the 'majority community', the Sinhalese often feel that they are not so much up against a 'minority community' of Tamils as against a Tamil 'nation' within the same polity. This perception, much in evidence only after independence, has gradually acquired a new and dangerous dimension.

First, panic struck the Sinhalese as they started grudging the 'disproportionately' large number of jobs and university seats which the Tamils were able to grab, thanks to a historical reason of being generally better educated. Soon, the resentment was reinforced by a strident revival of an old social prejudice.

Habitually, the Sinhalese have projected the Sri Lankan Tamils against a giant silhouette of the Tamil masses living on the Indian mainland. It has been reasoned that the Sri Lankan Tamils can always count on the cultural and political support of the Tamil-speaking Indian citizens. The Sinhalese, on the other hand, have no such ethnic friends close at hand, just outside their homeland. As a result, the Sinhalese suffer frequently from a paradoxical 'minority' complex, fearing they may be swamped one day by the Sri Lankan Tamils, with the latter receiving active help from 'kindred souls' living just across the Palk Strait.

It is indeed this political psychosis that manifested itself on the day the Indian Prime Minister signed the July accord with the Sri Lankan President in Colombo. Rajiv Gandhi is not of Tamil ethnic origin. But, in the eyes of the Sinhalese fanatics, his actions raised the spectre of an 'enemy's' hand stretching across the Palk Strait and into the heart of Sinhalese Sri Lanka. Therefore, when a lowly Sri Lankan naval guard assaulted Rajiv Gandhi at the ceremonial send-off following the July pact, the Sinhalese sailor was only acting subconsciously — inspired by the collective memories and myths of his own society\*.

Mercifully, the Indian Prime Minister escaped unhurt and the civilised world heaved a sigh of relief. The Indian President, R. Venkataraman, promptly spoke of the perils of "waging peace".

It was a stunning assault, as Rajiv Gandhi had just then pledged India and its troops to the extraordinary task of disarming the island's diverse Tamil militant groups. For India, it was indeed a delicate commitment. The guerilla bands had earlier operated from India, fighting among themselves and against the Sri Lankan armed forces, to create a separate nation-state of Tamil Eelam. Yet, the Indian Prime Minister's dramatic new pledge on that July day was seen by the Sinhalese diehard fanatics as no more than an act of political cunning of the first order.

The boisterous Sinhalese public opinion was orchestrated by the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranasinghe Premadasa, and the National Security Minister, Lalith Athulathmudali. Ever the anti-India hawks, they stayed away from the official ceremony at which Jayewardene and Rajiv proposed a toast for South Asian history with the political champagne of the July accord.

The Sinhalese anger against Rajiv Gandhi on that occasion had to be seen to be believed. Jayewardene too came in for rebuke. Violence erupted on a large scale even before the Indian leader arrived in Colombo to sign the political deed. Already, the accord, which was the only

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\* See Appendix I



*Signing their way into history: the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi (left) and the Sri Lankan President, Junius Richard Jayewardene, affixing their signatures on the official texts of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord in Colombo on July 29, 1987.*

*The two-leaders exchange pleasantries and the accord documents.*



purpose of his brief voyage of peace, was an accursed deal, from the point of view of the Sinhalese fanatics. So, their protest knew no bounds; Jayewardene greeted his new ally, Rajiv Gandhi, as the latter made a delicate touchdown for friendship, to begin an eerie diplomatic excursion in a curfew-bound Colombo. As the President saw it, the troubles of the day should not deter them from making history. At the time, he was apparently hoping to take all the flak in his stride.

The irate Sinhalese were also bitten by a history bug, but of a different kind. They saw Rajiv Gandhi as the latest potentate in a long historical line of invading Indian rulers of the island. The more knowledgeable protestors breezily recalled Clausewitz, the philosopher of war, who had remarked that "diplomacy is war by other means". They felt that the Indian Prime Minister pulled off a diplomatic coup by forcing Jayewardene to sign on the dotted line, even as the latter was basking in the success of a recent offensive against the Tamil Tiger guerillas in the Vadammarachi region. The timing of Rajiv Gandhi's peace offensive, therefore, came in for much adverse attention in Colombo. What lay at the heart of the Sinhalese fears was the perception that, while shaking hands with Jayewardene on that July day, Rajiv Gandhi was, in fact, concealing an iron hand in a velvet glove. It was, according to them, the iron hand of a man determined to dictate terms to Jayewardene. The Indian Prime Minister would ensure this by relying on the strength of the Indian troops then being called in to the island, though ostensibly to tame the Tigers. An Indian war against Sri Lanka, or, more precisely, the Sinhalese government, being won without firing a shot! This was the fevered imagination of the Sinhalese critics of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement on the very day it was signed.

These critics have not been proved right. But their fears persist to this day, because Indian troops are still operating actively in Sri Lanka, though they have not entered the Sinhalese heartland.

Losing no time after signing the July accord, Jayewardene indeed set out to spread the word that he could, with a sweep of his political arm, order the Indian soldiers to leave the island. There was just one concession to India's military sensibilities. He clarified that he would ask the Indian troops to pack up and go home only on the completion of their assignment of disarming the Tamil 'terrorists'.

But the task is far from over. In fact, it has become a bloody war against the Tigers — a scenario which the Indian soldiers had not dreamed of even in their wildest nightmares. With fierce motivation, the Tamil Tigers have drawn India into the quicksands of a guerilla war, even though some of their leaders had enjoyed India's goodwill till the day

of the July accord. In all, a heady anticlimax of which war fiction is made. Surely, it is a script that would have made a Hemingway proud!

As for the hard realities, some Sinhalese politicians, gloating over the bizarre turn of events, cock a snook at India's military 'inefficiency' in failing to bring the Tigers to their knees. What more! A few Sinhalese lieutenants of Jayewardene have even reached out to the Tamil Tigers behind India's back. This secret political dialogue with a Tiger emissary in February 1988 was aimed at settling the Sri Lankan Tamil problem without seeking India's good offices in the changed circumstances.

Time was when Jayewardene's men looked to India (and, India alone) to pressure the Liberation Tigers to talk of peace and settle for a political solution far short of Tamil independence. That was before and immediately after the July accord. But now, in February 1988, India was not amused at the free-lance diplomacy of a few Sinhalese and Tiger politicians.

The Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Jyotindra Nath Dixit, frowned at the clandestine manner in which some Sinhalese and Tamils sought to sideline India. Reportedly, he even remarked, in frustration, that the Sri Lankan Government and the Tigers might perhaps make common cause and ask the Indian peace force to stage a retreat.

At the same time, Dixit noted with satisfaction that Jayewardene, for his part, reaffirmed his commitment to the July accord, despite the sudden move to strike a deal with the Tigers without consulting India. Nonetheless, Dixit was annoyed at the Tigers' forays into the wonderland of diplomacy. More of that later.

At one stage, soon after the July accord, when India took the Sri Lankan Tamil problem into its own hands, some Sinhalese derisively nicknamed Dixit as the "*little Indian viceroy*". But Jayewardene slowly asserted his role under the agreement. And India too became defensive when, as a last resort, it decided to launch a military offensive against the Tigers to disarm them. The offensive, code-named 'Operation Pawan', commenced on October 10, 1987. Since then, India has had to do a lot of explaining to its own citizens, to the outside world and to the Sri Lankans.

The Indian military and political spokesmen have, no doubt, put on a brave face to hide their embarrassment at the slow pace of success. The main explanation, in military terms, centres on the innumerable logistical difficulties encountered in overcoming the Tigers' guerilla resistance. The parallel political reasoning is that the Indian aim is to avoid causing undue hardship to the ordinary Sri Lankan Tamil civilians, who often shelter the militants either willingly or under duress.

By the end of October 1987, India dislodged the Tiger guerillas from their sanctuaries in Jaffna city. But the overall operation has not been

called off, with the Tiger leaders making a tactical escape from there and keeping the Indian force on tenterhooks elsewhere in the island's Tamil region. As a result, India has suffered severe casualties, both in terms of men and morale — truly a galling experience for the Indian Army.

Landing in the Sri Lankan Tamil region in late July and early August 1987, the unsuspecting military personnel immediately sported the proud appellation 'Indian Peace Keeping Force', or I.P.K.F., for short. They were told they would be the flag-bearers of a new role for the Indian Army.

No doubt, on several previous occasions, the Indian Government had sent its armed forces personnel to keep the peace in such far-flung areas as Indo-China, Cyprus and the Congo. On all these peace jaunts in the past, the Indian troops had gone to serve as but one contingent of a large international military force. Also, these peace-keeping exercises had been carried out under the United Nations 'flag' and charter.

In contrast, the Sri Lankan expedition of the Indian peace force is a pioneering foreign policy initiative. The Indian troops have moved to Sri Lanka not on any United Nations initiative, but at the invitation of the President of that country. Of course, there is no transgression of the UN Charter. The I.P.K.F. does not, therefore, sail under false political colours. Yet it has had to face an identity crisis, following the tragic turn of events when it felt impelled to disarm the Tigers by force.

In the beginning, as the I.P.K.F. slowly got into its stride, Delhi did expect some resistance from the different Sri Lankan Tamil separatist groups, especially the Tigers. Some trouble was anticipated, because all the groups had suddenly found themselves blown off their feet when the Indian Prime Minister decisively clinched the July accord with Jayewardene. It was felt the Tamil groups would take some time to trim their sails to the new political wind. Therefore, Delhi concluded, they would first resist the idea of turning in their arms and ammunition.

India also realised that the Tamil militants would not respond quickly, having got used to the earlier leisurely ways of the Indian and Sri Lankan governments. There was yet another subtle aspect to reckon with. Under the protective wings of the Indian authorities, the militants themselves had grown complacent over a period of nearly four years before the July accord hit them like a bolt from the blue. This was the general assessment of the Indian policy-makers soon after the accord was signed.

The leader of the Liberation Tigers, Prabhakaran, was an exception all the time. For many months before the July accord, he was busy planning and plotting the elimination of his rival Tamil militant groups. At the same time, he was also consolidating his guerilla 'gains' in the Sri Lankan Tamil areas, and trying to outwit Jayewardene himself.

Delhi knew little of his real plans, as the Indian military and political intelligence authorities had never been able to penetrate the ranks of the Tigers to discover all their sources of arms and ammunition or get wind of their guerilla games.

In all, therefore, given the scanty military intelligence at its command, the Indian peace force did not brace itself for much more than a scuffle here and a skirmish there in its first moves to disarm the Sri Lankan Tamil groups. It merely extended open invitations to them to hand in their weapons and explosives.

Hoping that all the arms would be turned in, the I.P.K.F. first stage-managed a few media shows of arms surrender by one group or the other. At the inaugural show, a ranking Tiger leader, Yogi, parted with a pistol and collected a certificate of political amnesty from the Sri Lankan authorities.

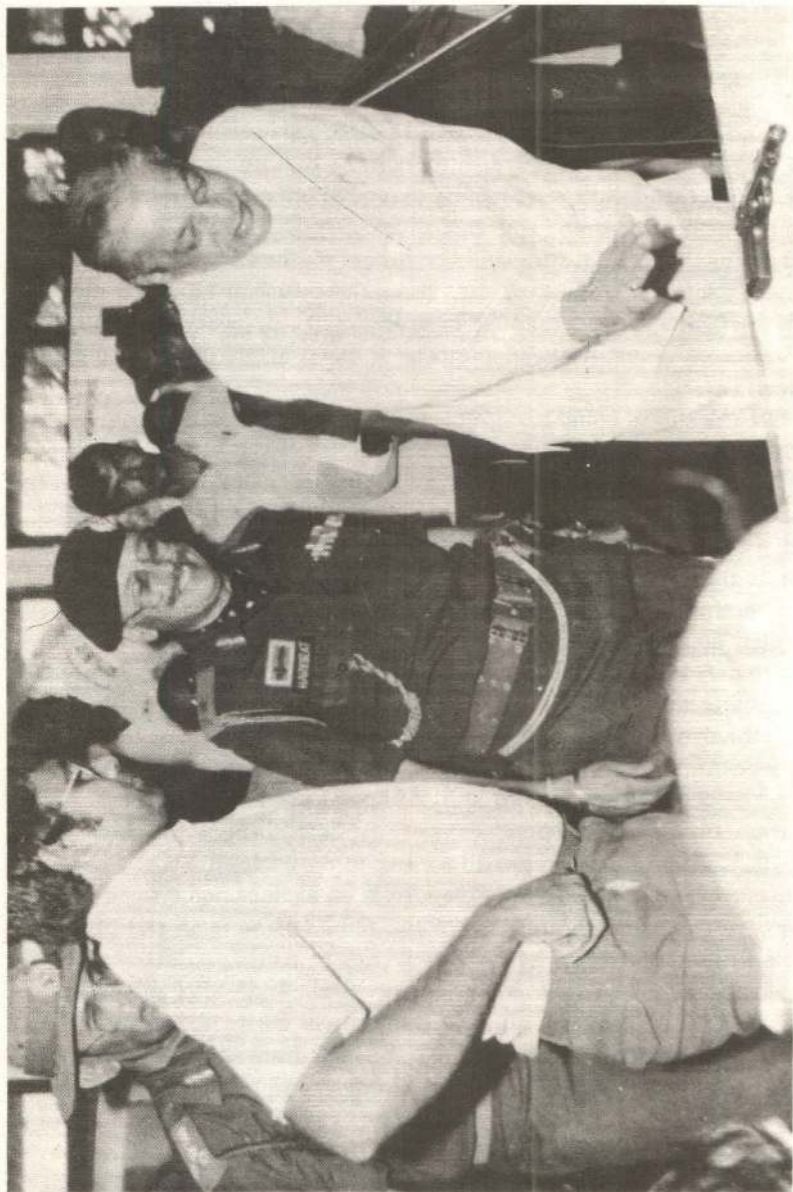
But the shows could not go on for ever, as each group would not participate in more than one or two public shows of arms surrender. Why? First, no group was willing to give the impression that it possessed huge quantities of weapons stockpiled in the past. Secondly, every guerilla band was keen on holding back as much weaponry and explosives as possible to prepare for the eventuality of running foul of its rivals.

Therefore, the initial Indian strategy of waiting for the arms hand-over blew up in its face. Far from kissing a farewell to arms, Prabhakaran chose to defy India's authority and even attacked the I.P.K.F. for untold reasons set out in the following chapter.

Prabhakaran's defiance gave him a new status as one of the three men whose actions would determine the fate of the July accord — the other two being Rajiv Gandhi and Junius Richard Jayewardene.

But, unlike the 'Three Princes of Serendip', Rajiv Gandhi, Jayewardene and Prabhakaran do not live in fairy tales to make a happy discovery of peace by chance. Serendip is an ancient name for Ceylon or Sri Lanka, while the princes of the fairy tale were in the unique position of stumbling on happy discoveries of truth.

Now, Prabhakaran was not a signatory to the Indo-Sri Lankan pact, and he later predicted that "the agreement will fail". Interestingly, in this context, he had indeed figured in some high drama behind the scenes on the eve of Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Colombo to sign the accord of July 1987. Suddenly, as it were, Prabhakaran was escorted by an Indian diplomat to Delhi, the Indian capital, from somewhere near Jaffna which, at the time, housed the tactical and political headquarters of the Liberation Tigers. Thereafter, he was given an audience by the Indian Prime Minister himself.



*A media show of arms surrender: Yogi (left foreground) a ranking leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, handed over a pistol, signalling their readiness to give up weapons. At the ceremony at Palali airport in Sri Lanka on August 5, 1987, the Sri Lankan Defence Secretary, Gen. A.S. Attygalle (right foreground) accepted the pistol.*

The Indian Prime Minister, clearly in an excited mood over the opportunity to find a place of honour in the history books as a peace-maker in Sri Lanka, told Prabhakaran of the need to move with the times. He also held out the assurance that the personal security and political interests of the Tigers would be duly taken care of under the proposed new dispensation.

Rajiv Gandhi was then racing against time to realise his own vision of a tryst with diplomatic destiny in Colombo. So, he hurriedly left Delhi, leaving Prabhakaran alone to mull over his relevance to the proposed peace process in Sri Lanka. This was a new experience for the Liberation Tiger leader who had, by then, got used to quite some pampering by the the Indian authorities, notably the late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M.G. Ramachandran.

Rajiv Gandhi himself had never really taken kindly to Prabhakaran, who chose to go underground just to avoid meeting the Indian Prime Minister on a particular occasion in 1985. On a different occasion, M.G. Ramachandran, in a fit of anger, even ordered the disarming of Prabhakaran and his men. They were still operating from the Indian soil and continued to do so even after 'Operation Disarm', which was a one-time punitive measure. However, the Indian and Tamil Nadu leaders had, on the whole, treated Prabhakaran with considerable courtesy and understanding. Therefore, in July 1987, the brusque manner in which Rajiv Gandhi brushed aside his objections to the proposed peace process left the Tiger leader sulking in his tent, though still in Delhi at the Indian Prime Minister's own instance.

Rajiv Gandhi, on returning home with the Colombo pact peeking out of his pocket, as it were, lost no time in putting the message across to Prabhakaran that there was no question of renegotiating the Indo-Sri Lankan accord. At the same time, India would give due priority to the political aspirations of the Tigers, it was further conveyed to Prabhakaran. Soon thereafter, Prabhakaran was sent back to Jaffna by a special flight, even as Rajiv Gandhi himself flew down to Madras, the Tamil Nadu capital, to explain the agreement to the ethnic Tamils of India.

Back among his own lieutenants and guerilla fighters, Prabhakaran took a few weeks to reassess his political options in the radically new situation. To keep all his options open at the same time, he first made some friendly noises, which the diplomatic apologists in Delhi interpreted as political music to Rajiv Gandhi's ears.

In a speech at Jaffna, Prabhakaran even announced his acceptance of the Indo-Sri Lankan pact. But he made it clear that he did so only on the understanding that India would now act as the sole custodian of

the Sri Lankan Tamils. He would also acknowledge the might of the Indian armed forces. Indeed, he and his men had always loved India and its people, Prabhakaran added for good measure.

*It was this speech, delivered in his usual undramatic and droning style, that fooled the Indian authorities, in the final analysis. In fact, even at the time, it was clear, to those who cared to read Prabhakaran's political signals, that he was already smarting under a sense of being caught in a peace trap. The prepared speech was laced with a transparent feeling of helplessness, on his part, at having to let India call the political shots, at least for the moment. So, if he could, he would defy India. This was the unspoken message of his camouflaged speech.*

On that occasion, Prabhakaran also let the impression prevail that his return to Jaffna was not in the manner of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returning to good times in Bangladesh in the afterglow of its liberation in 1971.

India's liberation of Bangladesh is certainly no parallel to go by, in evaluating Delhi's latter-day peace-intervention in Sri Lanka. The political policy that India has adopted in seeking to solve the Sri Lankan Tamil problem is completely at variance with the political objectives pursued in freeing Bangladesh from the hands of the then West Pakistani rulers. Yet, India has had the same prime humanitarian objective in the case of the Sri Lankan Tamils as it had shown in the affairs of Bangladesh in 1971.

In fact, the peace-intervention by the Indian armed forces in Sri Lanka raised instant hopes of a new dawn among the local Tamils. After all, they had earlier found themselves more or less on the same wavelength of suffering as the Bangladeshis in 1971.

Before the July accord, some citizen leaders among the Sri Lankan Tamils, in such far-flung places as Jaffna and Batticaloa, harboured hopes that India would intervene militarily on the side of the Tamil militants. The expectation was, of course, a wishful response to the economic and political blockade which the Sri Lankan Government had imposed on Jaffna long before India moved in. Yet, when the Indian troops did eventually land near Jaffna soon after the July accord, it was absolutely clear that they arrived only to disarm the Tamil militants themselves. There was to be no creation of an alternative 'protective' force among the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Therefore, from the standpoint of the Sri Lankan Tamils, Prabhakaran was not far off the mark when he showed no enthusiasm for the peace which India promised to bring about in the island's Tamil area. For the moment, though, he could not but envy the triumphant style in which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had returned to Bangladesh following India's intervention there.

Frankly, Prabhakaran never really betrayed any political pretensions to being a Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Nor was he imprisoned by the Sri Lankan Government in the manner in which Mujibur Rahman had suffered at the hands of the Pakistani government at the time.

Nonetheless, Prabhakaran felt he was a prisoner of the Indian political policy towards the Sri Lankan Tamils. So, he was not at all pleased with the circumstances of his return to the “promised land of peace”, namely the Tamil region of the island. The few days he had stayed in Delhi at Rajiv Gandhi’s instance, at the height of the political drama over the signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord, had really hardened Prabhakaran’s attitude towards India. The monetary ‘compensation’ which he was reportedly offered as a ‘price’ for his ‘acceptance’ of the accord did, in no way, neutralise his political ambitions. A fact which came to light soon enough, as a montage of events rolled out fast — some of them pre-planned by Prabhakaran and the others merely circumstantial.

Finally, almost inevitably, war broke out between Prabhakaran and the I.P.K.F. on October 10, 1987. There is still a dispute on who fired the first salvo. According to the various Indian versions, the Liberation Tigers were to blame for sparking off the actual fighting. They were also accused of resorting to numerous preparatory and provocative steps, like picketing the I.P.K.F. formations, killing the members of the other Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups, and slaughtering the Sinhalese who happened to live in the traditional Tamil areas.

The Liberation Tigers gave a different account. According to them, the I.P.K.F. had first signalled its war-like hostility when it killed a person in the picketing lines which they organised at Mannar a couple of weeks before the full-scale fighting flared up. From then on, it was just a matter of time for the outbreak of war.

As for the more immediate flash-point, the Tigers cited the Indian act of destroying their printing press, newspaper establishment and television station. This “vandalism” soured their relations with the I.P.K.F. to a point of no return to normality, they said.

Independent political investigation, to the extent possible in the circumstances, has shown that both sides are to blame. While the Tiger leaders didn’t relish the Indian entry from the beginning, the I.P.K.F. is to blame for reasons as follow.

The I.P.K.F. did not quite comprehend the political niceties of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord. While the agreement stipulated disarming all the Tamil militant groups without exception, much diplomatic skill was

needed to carry out the task. Basically, the operation should have been so conducted as to assure the local Tamil civilians of their security even after the eventual departure of the Indian force from the Sri Lankan shores. Of course, this is easier said than done. Yet, there was no other way. India had, after all, played the protector of the Tamil interests in the past.

To this day, the Sri Lankan Tamils have been relentlessly asking, "Who will protect us against possible attacks by the Sri Lankan Government, if the Tamil militants are neutralised and the I.P.K.F. leaves?"

What is the basis of such fears? In reality, Jayewardene's aerial bombardment of innocent civilians can never be erased from the ordinary Sri Lankan Tamils' collective consciousness.

As a frequent operational policy before the Indo-Sri Lankan accord was signed, the Sri Lankan Air Force had merrily rained bombs over the Tamil civilians. The bombings were explained away as a military ploy to alienate the Tamils from the 'terrorists' — as a counter-insurgency stratagem.

And at one stage, shortly before the July accord, when the Sri Lankan Air Force started firing on all cylinders, as it were, Rajiv Gandhi even accused Jayewardene of resorting to uncivilised carpet-bombing. For his part, swearing by his favourite shadow-God, the Buddha, Jayewardene promptly denied that he had ever ordered carpet-bombing as alleged by Rajiv Gandhi.

Nonetheless, while presently seeking to disarm the Tamil militants, the Indian authorities seemed to ignore all the public memories of the aerial bombardment as a mere event of history. As a result, India failed to appreciate the Sri Lankan Tamils' susceptibility to believe the worst about their future, given their horrific experiences at the hands of the Sri Lankan armed forces in the past.

Delhi also did not squarely answer the all-important question, "After the Indian force, what?" To an outsider, the question bristles with issues of high policy, diplomacy and politics. To the Sri Lankan Tamils, on the other hand, it is but a simple question of mere life and death. So far, only vague assurances have been held out that India will not quit the island in a hurry, leaving the local Tamils in the lurch.

If the Indian political powers-that-be have not allayed the Sri Lankan Tamils' fears of a future shock, the I.P.K.F. had actually queered the pitch for these fears. Right at the beginning, hardly a few days after the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene accord, Maj Gen. Harkirat Singh, the then commander of the Indian force, reportedly said, "If the arms are not turned in, we will go look for them". No doubt, Harkirat Singh was

acting under higher political orders, and the purpose here is not to cast a slur on his name. But the statement smacked of an arrogant attitude, unbecoming of a force that had gone to the island to protect the Tamils from any further attacks by the Sri Lankan armed forces. Or, so it seemed to the Tamils. The Tigers, smart at playing on Tamil sensibilities, annotated the Indian commander's statement through private channels of communication. They painted a scenario which, if transcribed in political parlance, will read as follows:

"The I.P.K.F. is determined to disarm the Liberation Tigers and others. After we are disarmed, Jayewardene may ask India to leave the island. Even if the peace force goes home only after lingering for a while longer, there will then be no credible Tamil force to protect the 'Eelam Tamils'. Jayewardene cannot be trusted to honour any commitment he may give the Indians that he would not harm the 'Eelam Tamils' after he bids goodbye and says 'thank you' to India. On the other hand, the peace force may indeed remain on the island to safeguard India's own geo-political interests. If so, India cannot at all be expected to take care of the 'Eelam Tamils'."

It is surely a fundamental flaw of the first order that the July accord has not spelt out how long the Indian force will stay in the island. But, taking advantage of this flaw, the Tamil Tigers, by far the most powerful of the militant groups, maligned India's political intentions.

From the Indian standpoint, the Tigers' political slate was an ingenious campaign of disinformation. But it does not absolve the Indian force of failing to display sufficient finesse in handling the disarming operation.

Harkirat Singh's statement on looking for arms was not really followed up in any concerted manner for nearly eight to nine weeks. The Indian political authorities had apparently stepped in to pre-empt any such hasty move of aggressive intent. The fear of antagonising the Sri Lankan Tamils, especially in the context of the Tigers' propaganda against the Indian force, might have weighed with the Indian authorities.

But the damage had already been done. The Harkirat statement gave the Tigers a plausible pretext to harden their resolve not to part with their weapons without a fight. The result: the I.P.K.F. launched 'Operation Pawan' to disarm the Tamil Tigers through military means.

The statement was perhaps made more as a sop to Jayewardene, who had come under intense pressure from the Sinhalese politicians for signing the accord with Rajiv Gandhi. A show of firm Indian resolve to ferret out the arms and ammunition of the Tamil militants would have mollified the ruffled feelings of the Sinhalese, it was calculated. But nothing would

have assuaged their anger at that stage; they were fundamentally opposed to the very idea of allowing the Indian troops to land in their country.

In any case, it was Jayewardene's problem, not India's, to sell the agreement among the Sinhalese. After all, he had signed it on behalf of the Sri Lankan Government.

No doubt, India is also a signatory. Yet, to all intents and purposes at the time, India committed itself to underwrite the accord only to help the Sri Lankan Tamils secure political rights and to further its own geo-political stakes.

Therefore, India could have gone about the business of disbanding the militant groups in a more discreet manner than it has set out to do. Admittedly, it was no easy task, given the Tigers' perception that the I.P.K.F. was mandated only to neutralise them so as to please Jayewardene. In return, India would gain the use of the Trincomalee port on the Sri Lankan eastern seaboard, besides a few other geo-political benefits, the Tigers alleged.

But, apparently at the time, India was not at all aware of the Tigers' real perceptions. Indeed, India was prone to underestimate their capacity for political intelligence as also their preparedness to engage India in a military confrontation.

Among all the Indian politicians and diplomats who have ever had anything to do with the Tigers, India's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Dixit, has had the most intimate contacts with Prabhakaran. This was so before the Indo-Tiger war broke out on October 10, 1987, when the I.P.K.F. began its offensive to tame the Tigers by force.

Following a long and detailed discussion with Prabhakaran in Jaffna on September 7 that year, I met Dixit at his office in Colombo, precisely two days later. When it was put to him that Prabhakaran was thinking in terms of a possible military showdown with the I.P.K.F., Dixit said, "Tell him, India is ready".

*India was indeed ready. But, on what basis? When eventually the Indo-Tiger war erupted, it appears that Delhi was armed with the assessment of the Indian external intelligence agency, R.A.W. (Research and Analysis Wing), that Jaffna city could be cleared of the Tigers in about 72 hours. This fact has come to light in independent political enquiries. But it took the Indian force more than three weeks, not three days, to clear Jaffna of "organised resistance by the Tigers" — to use the constant refrain of an Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesman. Even this became possible only after Prabhakaran and all his hardcore lieutenants had made a tactical escape from Jaffna.*

*What then was the basis of R.A.W.'s intelligence on Prabhakaran's firepower and stamina for urban and classical guerilla warfare? It appears*

that R.A.W.'s estimate of a 72-hour calendar of strategy for freeing Jaffna from the Tigers' control was governed by a crucial calculation. R.A.W. reckoned with only the arms and ammunition dumps which India had, in the past, helped the Tigers and other militant groups set up in the Jaffna region. India's help was related to the fact that these groups were then fighting the Sri Lankan armed forces to uphold the political and human rights of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Now, it is an open secret that India had given arms, ammunition and training in the use of arms to the Tigers and other Sri Lankan Tamil guerillas. Of course, for its part, the Indian Government has consistently denied any such participatory role in the Tamil militants' struggle against the Sri Lankan Government. And, so far, no one has come up with unassailable documentary evidence to contradict the Indian denial.

But several top Tiger leaders, as well as a few Indian officials, had in the past admitted in private conversations that India was indeed playing such a participatory role. These conversations took place well before the Indo-Sri Lankan accord was signed. Interestingly, the July pact and the annexures too make an indirect reference to India's role in the past. In a clear pointer to its previous role, India now committed itself not to allow the Sri Lankan Tamils to use its territory for activities directed against the Sri Lankan State.

On a different plane, Prabhakaran once told me that he had immensely valued the Indian territory as a staging-post for his activities against the "Sinhalese" government. At the same time, he was also confident of obtaining funds and weapons from other sources as well.

When it briefed the Indian force, R.A.W. seems to have grossly underrated Prabhakaran's stockpile of arms and ammunition procured from these other foreign sources. Hence the rosy feasibility report on freeing Jaffna in 72 hours or so.

There was also a clue to the R.A.W. report in the Indian official briefings of the time. An Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesman repeatedly maintained that if the I.P.K.F. had used air power in 'Operation Pawan', Jaffna could have been liberated from the Tigers in 72 hours.

These logistical niceties apart, India has, in fact, walked into a peace trap of its own making, getting bogged down in a prolonged anti-insurgency war with the Tigers. It is truly a political paradox of the Indo-Sri Lankan pact. Jayewardene too is caught in a peace trap of his own, while Prabhakaran viewed the July accord itself as a peace trap set for him by India.

## 2

# Sparks, fumes and strategy

LIKE all men of destiny in the world of politics, Velupillai Prabhakaran has had a flair for tempting fate.

In fact, Prabhakaran, at his best, is a political visionary gone astray. Perhaps, a perverse visionary. He has the zeal of a man of destiny, but not the moral, political or intellectual stature.

He has tempted fate a little too early, though he has had a few reasons.

A handsome young man, barely 35 years of age, Prabhakaran is fond of hitting the political headlines beyond the small realm of 'Tamil Eelam'. That is the name for a visionary land, a separate and sovereign nation-state for the Sri Lankan Tamils.

His dream has now collapsed, the dream of making and presiding over the political destiny of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

As a political-guerilla leader, he has lived by arms, breathing fire and brimstone, and speaking in the language of a wayward visionary. In the same breath, he would talk of the need for 'Tamil Eelam' as also the need to eliminate his rivals among his own Sri Lankan Tamils. Shades of fascism?

Prabhakaran has been wayward in his actions too. By provoking India to try and tame him, in a lightning turn of events a couple of months after the July accord, he has carried heroics a little too far. At the same time, the manner in which he has taken on the might of the Indian Army has made him a celebrity of sorts. Further, there is some method and reason in his seemingly 'mad' ways.

Born a Sri Lankan Tamil, he grew up as a hyper-sensitive witness to an era of socio-political and economic discrimination that his fellow Tamils suffered. His sense of belonging to a hapless minority was outraged. It did not take him long to pin the blame on the Sinhalese

who, as the major community, dominate the country's armed forces and the unitary government in Colombo to this day.

Soon enough, as a starry-eyed teenager with little or no formal education, he set out on a tryst with his own destiny, that of a political-guerilla. In the years that followed, he schooled himself in the arts of guerilla warfare, so that he could terrorise the Sinhalese and fight the Sri Lankan armed forces, both sworn "enemies".

In 1983, he engineered a grisly ambush of Sri Lankan soldiers at Jaffna, the citadel of Tamil culture in the island-republic. It was a tell-tale attack that sent shivers down the spine of the Sri Lankan Government. Before the benumbed government could react, Sinhalese mobs went on the rampage, as a reprisal, against the Tamils living in Colombo. The ambush had clearly shocked the Sinhalese out of their wits.

The mayhem in Colombo gave Prabhakaran the chance he was looking for. He now staked a claim for political legitimacy among the Sri Lankan Tamils. The stage was thus set for strengthening his own Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, still a small band of guerillas at the time.

Thereafter, the firepower and political importance of Prabhakaran assumed explosive relevance. India also began to back the cause of Sri Lankan Tamils in their battle for political and human rights.

Yet, for a variety of reasons, India has not always been a source of strength to him. Nonetheless, his meteoric rise as a political-guerilla leader paralleled India's growing interest in Sri Lankan Tamil affairs.

In due course, Prabhakaran and his followers even "liberated" Jaffna from the administrative control of the Colombo government. With some fluctuations in his fortunes now and then, he maintained a steady tempo of success till May-June 1987. By then, the Sri Lankan Government had perfected the "perfidy" of bombing its own defenceless citizens, the Tamil civilians, from the skies. And it pushed ahead in Vadammarachi, the north-eastern part of the Jaffna peninsula, inflicting a setback on Prabhakaran for the first time.

It was certainly not his Waterloo. He had gone to Vadammarachi a day or two before the Sri Lankan offensive was launched. He was indeed taken aback by the suddenness of the attack. It was a rare case of failure on the part of his own intelligence network to warn him of a government offensive. Yet he managed to escape by the skin of his teeth. He was helped in this by his deputy commander, Mahendraraja.

Nevertheless, the Tigers' loss at Vadammarachi set in motion a chain of events which culminated in the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement, and the arrival of the Indian peace-keeping force in the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka.

The Indian Prime Minister and the Sri Lankan President produced the agreement at a magical pace, as if pulling a rabbit out of a hat. Other countries, including the superpowers, stood mesmerised and acclaimed the accord at differing decibel levels. Rajiv Gandhi hailed it as a historic pact which, according to him, would safeguard the interests of the Sri Lankan Tamils and promote India's own "security interests", a euphemism for geo-political games.

Jayewardene blamed his own "lack of intelligence" in not coming up with a similar agreement in the past to prevent the near total civil war that had plagued his country. Apparently, wisdom suddenly dawned on him that all the blood-letting should end, and the antagonists — the Sinhalese and Tamils — should live in peace and amity hereafter. Shades of Asokan enlightenment? The Indian emperor Asoka embraced Buddhism only after the bloody Kalinga war. In contrast, Jayewardene was swearing by the Buddha long before his Asokan enlightenment. Some difference, but never mind such historical oddities. If it were not for them, the world would not be an interesting place!

The important point: in the afterglow of the July accord, Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene began to strut on the regional political stage with their heads placed firmly among the stars! They had swept off their feet all the other actors on the stage.

Prabhakaran quickly regained his political poise, if only to bide his time. But he could not easily recover from the trauma of a sudden agreement over which he had no say. His conflicting dreams of styling himself after Fidel Castro, Subhas Bose and Marshal Tito suddenly lost all relevance. It was soon a nightmare for the wayward visionary with a controversial record of killing fellow Tamils in his power struggle for ascendancy as the premier guerilla leader.

All the same, he would not give up hopes of a new and sunny dawn. He was convinced that the only reason why Rajiv Gandhi signed the pact with Jayewardene was to further India's geo-political interests in Sri Lanka.

*Projecting a contra-focus to India's geo-political pre-occupations, Prabhakaran told me in Jaffna that he would "play politics" to counter the Indian military presence in the Sri Lankan Tamil areas. Having known me for several years in Madras, when he was persona grata in India, he was pleased to talk to me intimately in Jaffna on September 7, 1987.*

*It was an important day, marking the first adverse turning point in his relations with India after the I.P.K.F. had landed in Sri Lanka. He was organising a public picketing of the Indian force on that day. It was to protest against the alleged failure of the Indian Army to insulate the Tiger cadres from attacks by the other Tamil militant groups.*

In the long conversation we had, covering a sweeping array of subjects, Prabhakaran indeed made a few constructive suggestions on how the July agreement could be implemented to his satisfaction. He said that only those Sinhalese who had settled in the Eastern Province before 1946 should be allowed to vote in the proposed referendum there. This plebiscite is designed to decide the fate of the unified Tamil province slated to be formed under the agreement by linking the Eastern Province with the existing Northern Province. For historical reasons, the Northern Province is almost entirely Tamil in character and culture. But the Eastern Province has a demographic mix of Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese.

The choice of 1946 as a cut-off year would ensure that the Sinhalese, most of whom 'colonised' the Eastern Province after independence, could not make possible the delinking of the province from the north. The Sri Lankan Tamils regard both the Northern and Eastern Provinces as their "traditional homeland".

Without lingering long over such finer details, Prabhakaran predicted that the "agreement will fail". He also accused India of attempting to run a "colonial regime" in the Sri Lankan Tamil territory. He was referring to the need to get the permission of the Indian Army to hold political meetings.

*Above all, he unfolded his strategy. Some aspects of the strategy were aired off the record, while some other features were spelt out in loud thinking. But the story can now be told, as the subsequent events reflect all the strands of the strategy.*

*According to Prabhakaran, India imposed the agreement on him and the Sri Lankan Tamils. In the name of safeguarding the interests of the Tamils, Rajiv Gandhi gained a foothold in Sri Lanka, in a singular pursuit of India's geo-political interests.*

*The scenario, as portrayed by Prabhakaran on September 7, 1987, is outlined here in the present tense wherever necessary, in view of the continuing relevance of his assertions and allegations. Rajiv Gandhi could impose his political will if, and only if, the Tigers are disarmed. The I.P.K.F. seeks to sound a death knell for the Tigers as a militant-political organisation. There has also been no matching political compensation to make good the Tigers' loss of the administrative control they had exercised over Jaffna. With India's military advent on the scene following the July accord, their political dominance over Jaffna disappeared almost instantly. Why then should he bow to India's "colonial rule"?*

*Therefore, Prabhakaran reckoned, he should upset India's political apple-cart on the diplomatic highway to 'hegemony'. He drew up a game-plan for*

reorienting the activities of the Tigers so as to try and ease India out of the island itself. The Tigers would have nothing much to lose by antagonising India. After all, Delhi is not likely to offer political sanctuary to them all over again, negating the July pact with Colombo.

Given this unwelcome reality, the best way to hasten India's exit would be to provoke the I.P.K.F. to attack the Sri Lankan Tamil civilians, Prabhakaran felt. The provocation should be so fine-tuned as not to arouse suspicion. In the event of blood-letting in such attacks by the Indian force, Tamil Nadu, the Indian State with an ethnic population of much relevance, "will soon be on fire". The political protests in Tamil Nadu in support of the Sri Lankan Tamils would then bring pressure to bear on Delhi, the Tiger leader calculated. India may even be forced to quit Sri Lanka in such a scenario.

For the record, putting a gloss over his real strategy, as just outlined\*, Prabhakaran said he would not shy away from engaging the Indian Army in the event of a clash resulting from a lopsided implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord. (In reality, he was keen on provoking India to assault the Sri Lankan Tamil civilians).

Asked how he could hope to take on the might of the Indian Army, if and when a clash ensued, he said on that September day that he would rely entirely on his skills in fighting and leading a guerilla war. He prides himself on being a marksman of the William Tell calibre\*\*.

The interplay of such proximate and ultimate intentions had guided Prabhakaran when he organised the public picketing against the Indian peace force on September 7, 1987. But India played it cool on that day. There were no clashes between the I.P.K.F. and the picketing men and women. Prabhakaran was dismayed.

He did not lose heart, as tension mounted by the day. The Tigers soon started articulating the demand that new batches of Sinhalese should not be allowed to settle in the Tamil areas of the island. In the false guise of uprooted people returning home after the July accord, new hordes of Sinhalese were trying to uproot the Tamils in turn, Prabhakaran charged. The available evidence confirmed his accusation.

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\* *Financial Express*, Delhi, Bombay and Madras editions dated 14 September 1987, and *Dinamani* (Tamil daily) Madras and Madurai editions dated 17 September 1987.

\*\* As the Swiss legend of liberation goes, William Tell was a marksman who refused to bow before the Austrian bailiff's hat that was mounted on a pole at a public place. For this act of dishonour, Tell was asked to shoot with an arrow an apple placed on the head of his son. William Tell did this with consummate skill and also arrowed down the bailiff.

The withdrawal of the hated Sri Lankan police from the Tamil areas was also sought. Indeed, India was accused of paving the way for the return of the Sri Lankan police to the Tamil region. When the Tigers administered Jaffna, the Sri Lankan police force had disappeared without a trace.

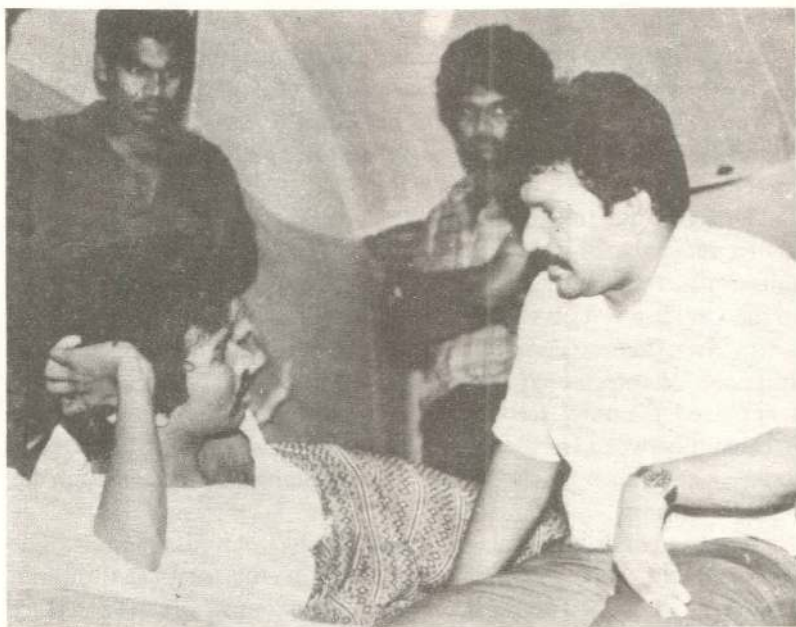
To focus the Indian Government's attention on these and other related demands, Thileepan, a prominent Tiger activist, went on a fast-unto-death. And he died, not heeding the appeals from India to give up the fast. It was a psychological moment of truth for the Tigers. The Indian High Commissioner, Dixit, stepped in to defuse the inflammable situation. He also entered into a miniaccord with Prabhakaran. In fact, it appeared the miniaccord would breathe new life into the main agreement between India and Sri Lanka. The main accord was already under seige from both the Tamil and the Sinhalese sides, though for different reasons.

It was a handsome deal, the Dixit-Prabhakaran miniaccord. The Tigers would have a predominant say in the proposed interim administrative council for the Tamil areas. The council was to be in place till the conduct of a democratic election in the planned new and unified Tamil province. For their part, the Tigers said they would abide by the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement.

A high noon of friendship between India and the Tigers, indeed? Or, so it appeared at the time. Prabhakaran and the Indian peace force had just then entered into a tacit understanding on a live-and-let-live attitude towards each other.

The Tiger leader, now frustrated at not having provoked the I.P.K.F. to attack the Sri Lankan Tamil civilians, was putting a new game-plan to test. Presently, he wanted India to concentrate on securing its geo-political interests in the island, giving a secondary priority to the Tamil affairs. The Indian peace force was willing. Or, so it seemed. The reasoning was: the I.P.K.F. could perhaps keep a low profile over Tamil affairs, in view of the likely formation of an interim council with a decisive say for the Tigers.

Also, at that juncture, India began to recognise the primacy of Prabhakaran in the affairs of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Of course, he was not acknowledged as a Nelson Mandela, who is nobly languishing in a South African prison to this day, or as a Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Bangladesh hero with impeccable nationalist credentials. Yet, Prabhakaran's immense relevance to the Sri Lankan Tamil affairs was fully conceded.



*Prabhakaran with the fasting Thileepan who sacrificed his life in the protest fast against India's role in Sri Lanka.*

*A girls contingent of the Liberation Tigers celebrating the capture of an Indian armed vehicle in the Indo-Tiger war.*



But, suddenly the proposed interim council fell in a heap, like a house of cards. In terms of the mini accord, Prabhakaran submitted to the Sri Lankan President a panel of three names for the post of a chief administrator-in-council. Acting on the mini accord, the President chose a man belonging to the existing Northern Province, the home of Prabhakaran and several of his hard-core lieutenants. The President had only picked a man from among the three suggested by Prabhakaran himself. In the process, Jayewardene had ignored Padmanathan whom the Tiger leader had listed as his first-preference candidate. So, Prabhakaran flew into a rage that Padmanathan, a native of the Eastern Province and a Tiger supporter, was overlooked. Colombo had earlier jailed Padmanathan for supporting the Tamil militants.

Prabhakaran contended that the President wanted to drive a wedge between the Tamils of the Northern Province and those from the east. Traditionally, the people of these two provinces do not sail together. But Prabhakaran was now keen on wooing the eastern Tamils by insisting on the selection of Padmanathan for the post of the chief administrator-in-council. The Tiger leader thought it was an opportune moment to woo them, because, just then, the self-effacing fast and death of Thileepan, a Tamil from the Northern Province, had made a deep impact on the psyche of the eastern Tamils. All this was fine as Prabhakaran's case against the President's nomination.

But the Tigers' supreme commander was not placing all his cards on the table. From the beginning, he suspected that the President would choose only a candidate from the Northern Province so as to send the Tigers into a spin. Knowing this, he was keen that the President should do precisely that. There is really no riddle here.

Prabhakaran clearly hoped to use the Presidential veto of his first-preference candidate to try and scuttle the mini accord he had just entered into with India. To seek the scrapping of the mini accord, he raised a hue and cry over the President's action. Otherwise, if Prabhakaran were really keen to have an eastern Tamil as the chief administrator-in-council, he could have easily nominated all the three candidates from the east itself, leaving no room for the President to play his hand at all. Because, whichever candidate was chosen, he would still be from the east.

Prabhakaran was determined to torpedo the mini accord on a different score too. The President had nominated Tissa Jayakkody as the Sinhalese representative in the proposed interim council for the Tamil areas. Among all the President's men, Jayakkody was the Tigers' nemesis. Formely, he was the Special Deputy High Commissioner in Madras, where the Tigers and other militant groups had stayed for long, enjoying India's diplomatic hospitality before the July accord.

Prabhakaran would not, of course, make an issue of the Jayakkody nomination. The President's right to choose a Sinhalese of his choice could not be reasonably questioned, at least in public. The President could nominate any candidate to represent the sizeable number of Sinhalese who live in the Eastern Province. But, the restraint over the Jayakkody nomination did not deter the Tiger leader from seeking to scuttle the miniaccord by raising a rumpus over the Presidential 'prejudice' against Padmanathan.

What were Prabhakaran's expectations? On several previous occasions, the Indian authorities had generally danced to his tunes. If India now took up with the President the case of Padmanathan, the miniaccord on the interim administration would fall apart. This was Prabhakaran's clear hope, in view of the President's known proclivity not to humour the Tigers.

But, by then, India was no longer in a mood to please Prabhakaran. The reason was quite simple but also profound. For the first time, India had secured the Tigers' written consent to an arrangement on at least one aspect of the political future of the Sri Lankan Tamils. In the immediate past, when the Tigers raised one issue after another, Delhi really had no moral authority to insist that they should fall in line and respect India's wishes. On those occasions, the Tigers had a legitimate argument that they were not privy to any of the arrangements concerning them. India had not also taken their prior consent before finalising any of those arrangements. So, the Tigers got away with their earlier objections to India's various suggestions.

The miniaccord changed all that, with the Tigers agreeing to the formation of an interim council. Prabhakaran and Dixit had held talks before finalising the council framework. Armed as he was with the Tigers' written consent, Dixit refused to budge and oblige Prabhakaran on the Padmanathan affair. The Tiger leader's plan of scuttling the miniaccord misfired. But, he would not give up.

Another crisis was presently brewing. He cleverly saw his chance and exploited it. In early October 1987, the Sri Lankan naval authorities took 17 Tigers as prisoners, contrary to the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement, and charged them with gun-running. For its part, the Tiger leadership maintained that among the captured men, only a few 'regional commanders' were in possession of personal arms. The I.P.K.F. had permitted the carrying of personal weapons by the Tiger 'commanders', it was further pointed out.

The Indian officials intervened to secure the release of the captured Tigers. The idea was to prevent any action by the Sri Lankan Navy that

might vitiate the already-tense political atmosphere in the Tamil areas. The Tiger leaders urged Delhi to act decisively in their favour. But India, which had gone to Sri Lanka with the air of a regional superpower, failed to persuade or pressure the Colombo government to set the captive Tigers free. The politics of India's failure is, of course, a different story. Like a clumsy schoolboy in the superpower league, India seemed to have blotted its political copybook.

According to a version by a top Tiger leader, Sathasivam Krishnakumar, alias Kittu, Dixit did promise to try and secure the release of the captive Tigers from Sri Lankan custody. But the Indian High Commissioner insisted that the Tigers should vow to abide by the July accord in exchange for the release. The Tigers refused to accept such a political trade-off. Interestingly, they had given India an informal assurance of abiding by the July accord, when Dixit and Prabhakaran signed the mini-deal.

But Prabhakaran was the master, and the Tiger leadership felt let down at the Indian demand in an hour of crisis. It was now a wounded tiger on the prowl. On October 5, 1987, twelve of the 17 captive Tigers died by consuming cyanide capsules. The Sri Lankan authorities looked foolish, as they were still making arrangements to fly these Tiger-prisoners out to Colombo for interrogation.

Normally, the Tiger leaders, as well as their followers, carry cyanide pills with them. Rather than risking torture at the hands of the 'enemy', they prefer to take their lives when they find themselves at the mercy of the 'enemy'. The underlying logic is as bizarre as it has overtones of bravery. Prabhakaran himself has shown me the cyanide capsule he carries.

His contention is that no man, whatever his moral courage, can endure physical torture beyond a point, which may vary from person to person. Therefore, this 'torture therapy' will soften the prisoner to the point of giving away the secrets of his organisation to the 'enemy'. Hence, the cult of the cyanide pill and the kiss of death.

The truth about the death of the 12 Tigers, including two 'regional commanders', will never be known to the satisfaction of all objective observers. No independent authority, whose word can be trusted, was present on the scene of the mass suicide to testify to the truth. Therefore, in the misty circumstances of the episode, it is not clear whether the Tiger leadership had passed on the capsules to those held captive by the Sri Lankan authorities. If, indeed, the Tiger leaders had acted as the merchants of death, they were only preparing the political ground for putting India in the dock of public opinion. On the other hand, it is

also possible that the Tiger-prisoners had voluntarily reached for the cyanide capsules which they were presumably carrying with them at the time of their capture. In this event, Prabhakaran would have merely saluted them for their incredible sacrifice, and set about the political business of confounding India. How?

From the day the Indian peace force set foot on Sri Lankan Tamil soil, Prabhakaran had been making out a case that his cadres' safety was at risk. First, he pointed to the failure of the I.P.K.F. to rein in the other Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups who had several scores to settle with the Tigers. He even suspected that India would like one of these other groups to kill him and his hard-core lieutenants. Unfortunately, the attitude of the Indian peace force at the time gave room for similar doubts in the minds of independent political observers. Credible documentary evidence to support, on snuff out, these suspicions will never come to light. After all, no sensible army commander would set down on paper such a strategy.

If the suspicions were right, India was then clearly banking on one of these other groups to do the dirty job of eliminating the main obstacle in implementing the Indo-Sri Lankan accord, namely Prabhakaran. As an amoral political strategy in dealing with the grisly world of guerillas, it was perhaps unexceptionable, when viewed from the Indian side of the fence.

Whatever the truth, Prabhakaran was able to carry conviction with his diehard followers on this issue. He cited the empirical evidence, of Tiger deaths in the gang wars, as proof of India's "nefarious" intentions. The gang wars flared up soon after India had landed in Sri Lanka. Prabhakaran himself had engineered a few of these gang fights, so that he could hope to confound India and reap some political benefits as a result.

After the mass suicide of the 12 Tigers in Sri Lankan custody, Prabhakaran also felt vindicated in his contention that India did not care to safeguard the lives of his followers. He drove home this point to motivate his men against the I.P.K.F.

Soon, the inevitable event in a surcharged atmosphere came to pass. As a revenge for the Sri Lankan action in capturing the 17 Tigers, Prabhakaran ordered his men to go on a killing spree. The innocent Sinhalese civilians living in the Tamil areas were sitting ducks.

More significantly, his actions were a war cry against the Indian peace force. In his opinion, this killing spree was a reprisal against India for its failure to secure the release of the Tigers who later died in Sri Lankan custody. The Sri Lankan armed forces would not have succeeded so easily

in capturing the Tigers when Prabhakaran's political writ ran in Jaffna. This was the argument which enticed his followers who, in turn, readily responded to his war cry against India. After all the Tigers were already motivated against India.

*To a casual observer, Prabhakaran's bravado was a folly of the first order. But the man sporting a spruced-up Stalinist moustache had other ideas.*

*He deliberately chose to provoke India so blatantly. He expected the I.P.K.F. to counter-attack, killing Sri Lankan Tamil civilians in the process. He thought he would then be able to arouse the ethnic sympathies in Tamil Nadu, just across the narrow Palk Strait that separates Jaffna from India. His strategy was now in operation. In his political calculus, a public outcry in Tamil Nadu would not only stop the Indian peace force in its tracks but would also put pressure on Delhi to pack up and leave the Sri Lankan Tamil homeland.*

*His earlier idea of provoking India against the Sri Lankan Tamil civilians in as subtle a manner as possible was now given up. The bright spark of that subtle idea had now turned into fumes of anger against India and assumed the proportions of an open provocation. The intense frustration at having failed to provoke India in a subtle manner served as the catalyst to transform the spark into fumes in the strange but real political alchemy of Prabhakaran.*

*Therefore, I was not in the least surprised when Prabhakaran gave the war cry against India. He had already given a deep insight into his thinking during the course of that long conversation in Jaffna on September 7, 1987.*

*For its part, India obliged him by launching an offensive against the Tigers on October 10. Despite India's great care, the Sri Lankan Tamil civilian casualties mounted by the day. That was inevitable in fighting urban-guerilla resistance in a densely populated city like Jaffna. So, Prabhakaran's strategy even looked like succeeding. But he was to be disappointed soon. The people of Tamil Nadu would not oblige him by rising in revolt over the Indian offensive against the Tigers.*

As we shall see later, there was no love lost between the ordinary Tamils of South India and the Sri Lankan Tamil militants. So, they would not admire the audacity of Prabhakaran in challenging the Indian peace force or actively support him in his adventure.

Prabhakaran himself was only trying to break free from the peace trap as he saw it. He reckoned that India was perhaps interested in bringing peace to the Sri Lankan Tamils. But in reality he felt trapped by this process, unable to pursue freely his long-term objective of lording it over the Sri Lankan Tamils. To be fair to him, he would be a benign dictator of 'Tamil Eelam', being ruthless only towards real or potential opponents.

One of the oddities of the Indian policy towards Prabhakaran is that Delhi has been judging and condemning him by the political standards of a democrat. Democratic behaviour is certainly a desirable attribute in civilised politics. But people like Prabhakaran had grown up in a social environment of State-sponsored discrimination against the Tamils, which was not conducive to the flowering of a democratic temper among the younger generation. Interestingly, none of Prabhakaran's rival militant groups has had a democratic tradition of functioning, either. The cadres of all these groups belong to the younger generations, while only people like the Tamil United Liberation Front leader, Appapillai Amirthalingam, belong to the older generations. The elders enjoyed the benefits of a relatively better social atmosphere to graduate as democrats in politics.

All this is not to hold a political brief for Prabhakaran and his actions. The purpose has been a presentation of Prabhakaran's politics in a situation of objective realities as viewed by him and others who have interacted with him.

By taking on the might of the Indian Army, Prabhakaran had tempted his fate. His only hope was that Tamil Nadu would rise in revolt against the inevitable deaths of Sri Lankan Tamil civilians at the hands of the Indian peace force. He was prepared for the big gamble of provoking India only on the basis of this hope.

Soon, the heat was on, as the I.P.K.F. was ordered to track him down. He made a tactical escape from Jaffna itself, allowing the city to 'fall' into Indian hands. An amazing array of guerilla tactics, weapons and explosives were brought into spectacular play in the process.

Most of these weapons and explosives had been procured primarily in the international arms market, without reference to the friendly India of the past. Prabhakaran and his men, not to speak of a small band of Tiger guerilla-girls too, inflicted stunning casualties on the Indian Army. But, by the turn of 1988, he saw the writing on the wall and sued for peace, at least for tactical reasons.

And, on January 13, 1988, Prabhakaran wrote to the Indian Prime Minister as follows: "In view of the continuing violence, disruption of peace in Tamil areas and the immense suffering placed on our people, I appeal to you, once again, to call off (the) military offensive operations and initiate peace negotiations to end all hostilities and to establish peace and normalcy.

"It is our considered opinion and that of the people of Tamil Eelam that cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of (the) peace keeping forces to (the) pre-offensive positions will facilitate the return of peace

and normalcy in the Tamil areas. As a preliminary measure towards peace, we urge you to prevail upon Sri Lanka to grant amnesty to (the Tigers) and to release our members and supporters who are presently in custody with the I.P.K.F.

“As previously agreed in the minutes of agreement between the Government of India and the (Tigers), we pledge to surrender our arms as soon as an interim administration is formed with a majority role for our organisation.

“As we have repeatedly assured you, the (Tigers) will cooperate with the Government of India in the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord if (the) Tamil interests are promoted and (the) Tamil people are protected.....”

What does the letter reveal? Having badly burnt his face in the fires of the Indo-Tiger war, Prabhakaran finally wished to salvage all his political chestnuts, if India were willing. Tempting his fate in the manner of a man of destiny, he could now control it no longer.

History has, of course, known far more celebrated men of destiny act similarly, both in peace and war. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Indian nation, possessed a flair for tempting fate. As an apostle of peace, he hated all the pomp and trappings of personal security. In the end, he fell to an assassin's bullet. He had taken chances with his personal security for too long a period. He died, but only as a rare martyr of moral courage.

At the other end of the spectrum of world history, Adolf Hitler suffered from megalomania — an insatiable thirst for military and political power over men and women, far and wide. He took much care about his personal safety. But, when he tempted his luck too long, giving his conquest-mania a wild run, he had to end his own life.

*Now, Prabhakaran has never shown the faintest desire of following in the Mahatma's footsteps. Some political observers, on the other hand, view him as a pocket-size Hitler on the regional Tamil scene. But, whatever his public image, his motivation for capturing power and his zeal to motivate others certainly cannot be underestimated, as the I.P.K.F. has discovered at considerable cost.*

*Indeed, an interesting theory is doing the rounds on the Indian military and political intelligence circuit. It is said that Prabhakaran has some mild imperialist pretensions. His aim is to create a separate State of 'Tamil Eelam' and then extend his political sway over neighbouring Tamil Nadu!*

## Military messiah of peace

THE theory that Prabhakaran preens a faint imperialist feather may be more apocryphal than real. During his long stay in India when he directed the guerilla war against the Sri Lankan Government before the July accord, he had never betrayed extra-territorial ambitions. In fact, he had not even formed a provisional government-in-exile on the Indian soil.

On several occasions, he had told me that he would consider proclaiming 'Tamil Eelam' only when Trincomalee is "liberated" from Colombo's control. Trincomalee, the strategic port on the Sri Lankan east coast, has a mixed population of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims. But the Tamils claim it as their own, citing tradition and history. The Sinhalese also covet Trincomalee, saying that Gokanne is the earliest name for this port city, thus signifying its link with their language and culture.

For the present, Trincomalee is in the news, thanks to India's geo-political ambitions there. Jayewardene has assured Rajiv Gandhi that Trincomalee and other ports in the island will not be used to subvert India's military interests.

But, before India could spruce up Trincomalee as a geo-political sanctuary, it has got bogged down in a peace trap of its own creation. The I.P.K.F., caught in the trap in the Sri Lankan Tamil region, has been busy keeping its morale high, in the face of ferocious fighting by the Tigers.

It is perhaps in this context that the theory of Prabhakaran's faint imperialist stripes has been propagated. Transparently, the idea is to boost the morale of the Indian soldiers, projecting Prabhakaran as an 'enemy' who would pounce on a part of India itself, namely Tamil Nadu.

At first, when they landed in Sri Lanka in July-August 1987, the Indian troops were at a loss to identify the Tamil Tigers as the enemy

incarnate. After all, when they arrived in Sri Lanka, the Indian Army's officers and men thought it was the local Tamils whom they might have to protect from attacks by the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan armed forces. In reality, such a scenario was drawn up for the transition period before peace and the proposed new political process in the Tamil region.

At the time, the Sri Lankan Army was very much on the rampage against the Tamils. Soon, it returned to its barracks in the same region. It was a step in the true spirit of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord\*. The I.P.K.F. encountered little or no resistance from the retreating Sri Lankan Army.

India had indeed started on the right note as a military messiah of peace. At that stage, Colombo could no longer treat Prabhakaran as well as the other militants as enemies of the Sri Lankan State. The local Tamil people themselves were ecstatic in welcoming the I.P.K.F. They still had happy memories of India's recent air sortie of relief supplies.

When they were reeling under the impact of a prolonged economic blockade that Colombo had clamped on them, India cheerfully made the goodwill gesture of air-dropping food supplies. That was just before the July accord. The real-life pie-in-the-sky mission was carried out by transport planes that were escorted by Indian Mirage fighter-bombers.

The air-relief excursion was code-named 'Operation Poomalai' (meaning garland of flowers, in Tamil). In a sense, it was this air-relief exercise which forced Jayewardene to sign the July accord.

The ordinary Sri Lankan Tamils were also euphoric over India's decision to underwrite their political future as part of the July pact. So, they went into a song-and-dance over the arrival and deployment of the I.P.K.F. in their traditional homeland. India could not have asked for a happier beginning at that stage.

Nevertheless, the chequered history of Sinhalese-Tamil relations could not be wished away, but India committed a mistake. It allowed the hated Sri Lankan police to resume work in the sensitive Tamil areas where it had been kept on a leash by the Tigers in the previous couple of years. Soon, the Tigers raised a rumpus, accusing India of permitting the return of the "racist" Sri Lankan police.

The Indian force did not, of course, infringe the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene agreement in allowing the Sri Lankan police to operate in the explosive Tamil areas all over again. Yet, the Tamils expected India to hold out a credible assurance that the resumed activities of the Sri Lankan police would be closely monitored. Paradoxically, the I.P.K.F.

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\* See Appendix II

was in no position to guarantee the good behaviour of the Sri Lankan police force. In fact, no sooner had the ink dried on the Indo-Sri Lankan accord, Jayewardene began quibbling over the finer points. He was understandably keen on playing to the Sinhalese gallery. But his utterances put a strain on the I.P.K.F. operations. His famous first statement was that the Indian peace force would function under his own command, taking no direct orders from Delhi.

Therefore, the I.P.K.F. could not announce any plan to monitor the Sri Lankan police in the Tamil heartland. Even if it wanted to keep an Argus-eyed vigil over the Sri Lankan police, it could not say so with any degree of credibility. In fact, Jayewardene's statement would have led to a curious logic; the Sri Lankan police would be watched by the Indian peace force which, in turn, would be watched by the Sri Lankan President himself! Thus, right at the beginning of its peace mission, the I.P.K.F. had the taste of a delicate dilemma.

As for the fundamental question of disarming the Tamil militants, the I.P.K.F. faced a dilemma of a different kind. When the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene pact was signed, a week's time was given to all the militant groups to hand in their weapons. But India itself took considerable time to persuade Prabhakaran to fall in line with the wishes of the two leaders. He was flown back to Jaffna from Delhi only some time towards the fag-end of the week's deadline. Acceding to Rajiv Gandhi's wishes in a make-believe gesture, Prabhakaran, of course, ordered his men to start surrendering their weapons. By then the original deadline had indeed passed.

It was at this delicate stage that Maj. Gen. Harkirat Singh made the affirmation on looking for arms if they were not turned in. As we have seen, the higher Indian authorities apparently let the Harkirat statement remain merely on the record, without giving any directive for instant follow-up action. Obviously, it was then felt that a forcible seizure of arms was fraught with dangerous consequences.

In fact, at one point in his earlier encounters with the Indian officials in Delhi, Prabhakaran had reacted angrily to the Indian threat of using force to dispossess any defiant militants of their weapons. Later, Rajiv Gandhi helped cool the tempers when he personally spoke to Prabhakaran. In a 'secret' deal, India also offered to give money for the "rehabilitation" of the Tiger cadres, depending on their "willingness" to be disarmed.

*As a result, the special attention that Prabhakaran received in Delhi and his own friendly noises towards India soon thereafter lulled the Indian peace force into a state of inertia. It also had no immediate clue at this time on*

*how to interact with Prabhakaran, who was speaking of his love for India. Little did the I.P.K.F., not to speak of its political bosses, realise that Prabhakaran was only pulling the wool over their eyes.*

*At about the same time, there was also an impression among the I.P.K.F. authorities that Prabhakaran would be catapulted to power in the planned interim political set-up. In the transition period before the formation of a new provincial council following the proposed democratic elections, the interim council was supposed to conduct the affairs of the Tamils.*

*On the whole, a myopic perception of the importance of Prabhakaran blinded the Indian peace force to his real strategy of trying to ease India out of the island itself — by some means or the other.*

Meanwhile, as briefly noted elsewhere, gang wars flared up among the different Tamil factions. It is difficult to say who triggered these clashes which followed the arrival of the I.P.K.F., though Prabhakaran himself is believed to have motivated his men to spark off a few clashes as an ironic greeting to the I.P.K.F.

The casualties among the Tiger-opponents rose steeply. At the same time, pointing to the deaths of a few Tigers in these factional fracas, Prabhakaran quickly blamed the I.P.K.F. for “failing to protect” his cadres. Prior to the arrival of the Indian peace force, his rivals could not easily lay their hands on the Tigers who controlled the Jaffna region, he said. In a sense, the peace force had actually “destroyed” the peace that was prevalent in the region, the Tiger leader charged.

For its part, the I.P.K.F. looked at the scene through a different lens. Delhi was worried at the rising number of deaths among the non-Tiger groups, such as T.E.L.O., short for the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, P.L.O.T., or the People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam, E.P.R.L.F. (the Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front) and so on.

It was thought that the Tigers could take care of themselves to a greater degree than these other groups in the gang wars. Already enfeebled by the Tigers in the earlier internecine warfare for guerilla supremacy, the other groups were indeed vulnerable. Delhi apparently did not want to see these other groups suffer further casualties at the hands of the Tigers. By inflicting a heavy new toll on these other groups, the Tigers’ death squads would bring a bad name to the I.P.K.F. — on the ground that it could not safeguard the lives of the Tamils. This seemed to be the thinking in Delhi at that time.

Ironically, there was then no sign of the latter-day Indo-Tiger war in the political crystal ball of the Indian policy-makers. The continuing

Indo-Tiger war, as we know, has caused a lot of casualties among the Sri Lankan Tamil civilians too. Never mind that irony at this stage.

As the shock waves of the gang wars greeted the I.P.K.F. in the first few weeks after its arrival in Sri Lanka, India could not but get worried over the deaths among the non-Tiger groups. It appears Delhi soon decided to arm these anti-Tiger groups. Many of their cadres and leaders who were still in India were sent to the Sri Lankan Tamil region. This is admitted by some Indian authorities in private conversations.

What then started as a holding operation to help the anti-Tiger groups in the factional fights against Prabhakaran gradually took on other overtones. As the group rivalries raged on, it looked as though the I.P.K.F. would heave a sigh of relief if Prabhakaran perished accidentally in these clashes. Significantly, Prabhakaran had, by now, organised the picketing protest against the Indian peace force.

Yet, on a higher plane, the Indian political high command was keen that the premier Tiger leader should not ruin the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene accord. Indeed, Dixit repeatedly radioed Delhi that the agreement should not be allowed to slip into the dustbin of history. India's credibility as a peace-interventionist was at stake, he kept emphasising. So, Dixit continued to recognise Prabhakaran's primacy, despite the latter's war of attrition with the I.P.K.F. at that stage, and soon brought him to the negotiating table. At the time, Thileepan, the Tiger activist, lay dying in a protest-fast against India. But, as we have noted already, the Dixit-Prabhakaran mini-accord, which was now reached, collapsed soon afterwards. Immediately thereafter, the Indian troops swung into action against the Tigers.

The battle for Jaffna was as fierce as it was a prolonged affair. The prestige of the fourth largest army in the world was at stake. The Tigers fought a classical urban guerilla war, with astonishing ability and firepower. They laid death traps for the Indian soldiers using land mines. It is also said that the Tigers have perfected a technique which the Palestine Liberation Organisation had first practised in its pristine days.

As the Indian soldiers advanced towards Jaffna from Palaly, the I.P.K.F. headquarters, and various other directions, they literally walked into the land mines or booby traps. If, taking reflex action, they jumped to the sides of the road on which the mines had been laid, they came under 'flash fires' that were triggered by a Tiger activist or a sympathiser from somewhere in the vicinity. India lost many fine officers and men in these explosions.

As the toll mounted, it soon dawned on the I.P.K.F. that it had badly tripped over a peace trap, as it were. The troops also suffered from



*Lt. Gen. Depinder Singh (left), formerly General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Indian Army's Southern Command, and the overall commander of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force in Sri Lanka, being briefed on the logistics of 'Operation Pazwan' in the early stages of the Indo-Tiger war in 1987.*

*Soldiers of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force training their weapons on suspected hide-outs of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The I.P.K.F. is made up mainly of soldiers and officers drawn from the Indian Army. While necessary support is provided by the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy, units of the (Indian) Central Reserve Police Force, including women cadres, are also on duty in the Sri Lankan Tamil territory.*



a trap syndrome in a literal sense. The Indian policy-makers ordered that the I.P.K.F. should not use air power in 'Operation Pawan', the code name for the military operation to liberate Jaffna from the control of the Tigers. The Indian soldiers felt trapped in a land war on alien territory which the opposing guerillas knew like the palm of their hand.

*Air power was avoided like a plague that might harm the Sri Lankan Tamil civilians. The use of heavy artillery was also severely curtailed for the same reason. Nevertheless, the I.P.K.F. officers and men fought a truly brave war and freed Jaffna from the Tigers in over three weeks, even as the guerilla leaders made a tactical exit from the city. The military acumen of the Tigers came in for handsome tribute from the surviving Indian troops.*

*For the first time, the Indian Government now began to realise how badly it had fallen into a peace trap in political terms. The Indo-Tiger war is the political price which Delhi has paid for not having associated the Sri Lankan Tamils themselves with the 1987 July accord.*

*The Sri Lankan Tamils are not a party to an agreement on their own political future. Why did India commit the elementary mistake of keeping them out? Or, was it a calculated risk that Delhi took? If so, why did it misfire?*

## 4

# Mystery of the missing signature

THE Indian decision not to ask the Sri Lankan Tamil representatives to sign the July accord was governed by a short-term realpolitik consideration. It was apparently perceived that no Tamil group, not even the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front, would have been willing to sign on the dotted line, at short notice. And they would have been expected to do precisely that, if they were to toe the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene line.

The Indian Prime Minister was also not enamoured of an alternative card on the diplomatic table. He could have altogether avoided signing on behalf of a section of the citizens of another country, namely the Sri Lankan Tamils, in this case. In fact, the demand, in certain Indian quarters, for the withdrawal of the I.P.K.F. has snowballed from the icy objections to Delhi's role as a signatory on behalf of the citizens of another country. The Indian critics contend that Rajiv Gandhi should have prevailed on Jayewardene and the Sri Lankan Tamils themselves to sign a mutual accord, without India's own signature. Delhi could have just underwritten such an accord indirectly through assurances appealing enough in the eyes of both the Sri Lankan adversaries. So runs the argument.

What were the prevailing circumstances in which Rajiv rushed to sign the deal with Jayewardene? By July 1987, four years had already passed since the anti-Tamil riots broke out in Colombo, sparking off a series of political-ethnic fires of racial hatred in the island. In this period, the Sri Lankan armed forces had finally come of age.

Helped by Mossad, the Israeli counter-insurgency outfit, they chalked up plans to meet the Tiger threat. Reportedly, they also received

advice from Pakistani personnel on the logistics and other aspects of waging a war against guerillas. British mercenaries, all former members of the elite force, SAS, were also commissioned. South Africa too figured in the diplomatic gossip as another source of strength to the Sri Lankan armed forces.

There was a joke in the beginning that the average Sinhalese soldier would lay down his rifle and run for a bottle of arrack, if that were shown to him in the midst of a battle. All that changed. But it was not a sudden or dramatic transformation. In fact, the Sri Lankan forces lost to the Tigers in the summer of 1986. It was only after this that the Tigers announced their plan to take over the civil administration in Jaffna from January 1987.

Undeterred by the setback in the summer of 1986 and the slow pace at which the Sinhalese soldiers learnt to fight bravely, Jayewardene himself set out on a political campaign of diplomatic courtship, intended to boost the morale of his soldiers. He pleaded with the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, to step up aid to his country through the normal channels. He may have even tried to play the so-called American political card.

At one stage, it was reported, the Sri Lankan Government proposed a deal with the American Central Intelligence Agency. It was said that Colombo was willing to let a couple of Singapore-based firms acquire full-scale operating rights in Trincomalee port. The companies were allegedly acting as C.I.A.'s front organisations. As a *quid pro quo*, the U.S. Government would send funds and arms to Sri Lanka through normal channels, it was rumoured.

Above all, the story goes, the U.S. President, Ronald Reagan, would have connived at Jayewardene's plans for an all-out military offensive against the Sri Lankan Tamil guerillas in a 'fight to the finish'.

But the U.S. Government, far from gloating over the C.I.A. 'dirty trick', is believed to have spurned the very idea of such a deal with Sri Lanka. India, for its part, seems to have got wind of the abortive Colombo-C.I.A. deal. At that time, Delhi itself was apparently mulling over the idea of intervening in Sri Lanka, either as a military force or as a peace corps.

By now it was the spring of 1987. The invigorated Sri Lankan armed forces, if left alone, were poised to overrun Jaffna, the nerve-centre of the island's Tamils, then in the hands of the Tigers. Significantly, neither India nor Sri Lanka had an inkling at that stage of how well the Tigers had drawn a *cordon sanitaire* around Jaffna, through a network of land mines and booby traps that could be set off at a moment's notice.

Clever at painting a gory picture of Sinhalese intentions, the Tigers were then spreading the word that the Sri Lankan armed forces were ready to launch an all-out offensive to capture Jaffna. Just then, Colombo had handed a defeat to the Tigers at Vadamarachi, where Prabhakaran's village is located. As noted elsewhere, Prabhakaran was himself taken aback at the Sri Lankan assault on Vadamarachi. It was a clever move on the part of Lalith Athulathmudali, the Sri Lankan National Security Minister. He wanted to strike at Prabhakaran's home while Prabhakaran himself was expecting a raid on Jaffna city.

India and the Tigers knew that the latter could not hold out for long in Jaffna, if the Sri Lankan Air Force were to swing into action with telling effect. It had already done so on select targets, through a blitzkrieg on innocent Sri Lankan Tamil civilians.

The people of Jaffna were now suffering from untold misery under the economic blockade which Jayewardene had imposed as a reprisal against the Tigers' move to take over the civil administration there. India could not sit idly by while the Sri Lankan Tamils were suffering.

*The late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, had once enunciated the country's foreign policy towards its neighbours. This came to be known as the 'Indira doctrine' in diplomatic parlance. In simple terms, the doctrine is as follows: India will not interfere in the internal affairs of its neighbours, but it cannot remain a silent spectator if the domestic events in a neighbouring country were to impinge on India's own ethnic sensibilities.*

Rajiv Gandhi, who succeeded his mother, Indira Gandhi, as the Prime Minister of India, did not at first show much enthusiasm for the 'Indira doctrine'. Even when he gradually began to grapple with the Sri Lankan problem, he first tended to give the benefit of the doubt to the powers-that-be in Colombo.

Yet, by the middle of 1987, when the Sri Lankan armed forces threatened to overrun Jaffna and subjugate the Tamils, Rajiv Gandhi suddenly turned to the 'Indira doctrine' in a flash. India had, no doubt, intervened forcefully in Bangladesh, known then as East Pakistan, to liberate the Muslim Bengalis from the dominance of the West Pakistani rulers.

But Rajiv Gandhi would not take the beaten track. He was not inclined to go by India's past memories alone. Of course, the option of military intervention in Sri Lanka seems to have been considered, but only as just that — an option, not a firm policy decision. The thought waves of an active military intervention to "liberate the Sri Lankan Tamils" had been set in motion by the Colombo government's offensive in the Vadamarachi region a few weeks before the denouement of the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene agreement.

Prabhakaran, who was in India's good books at the time, also did not press India to cross the political Rubicon\* and invade Sri Lanka. Interestingly, Prabhakaran had never really asked India to win a battle or war for him at any stage in the past. He was certainly afraid of becoming a puppet in the hands of the Indian Government if the latter were to help him openly.

So, it seems, Rajiv Gandhi had no difficulty in brushing aside the option of a military invasion of Sri Lanka. His diplomatic whiz-kids came up with a 'creative' alternative. They suggested that India should send a flotilla of food-laden boats to the suffering Sri Lankan Tamils. It was not gunboat diplomacy, as the flotilla would not be escorted by warships or fighter-bombers.

The planned mission, in early June 1987, was a disaster. The boats that had set sail from a small port on the Tamil Nadu coast beat a hasty retreat, when confronted by menacingly armed Sri Lankan naval vessels. India lost face, and Sri Lanka spoke of the might of the small nation, a new phenomenon in world politics since the end of World War II.

But Delhi would not eat the humble pie! With lightning speed, India organised an aerial food relief mission (as noted briefly in a previous chapter). Transport aircraft carried the supplies, with Mirage fighter planes providing escort. The mercy mission touched the raw nerves of the Sinhalese political psyche, and the Sri Lankan Government denounced the violation of its airspace by the Indian bombers. Jayewardene even referred to it as the twenty-first instance of Indian invasion of his country since the beginning of history.

He also contemplated raking up the issue at the United Nations, but stopped in his tracks, as Delhi sent signals that his government's record of human rights violations in the Tamil region would then be publicised.

Having thus made the point that Jayewardene could no longer take India for granted as he moved to subdue the Sri Lankan Tamils, Rajiv Gandhi soon took to wings for some top-flight diplomacy. Dixit emerged as a key actor and the July accord was announced.

Basically, the finer points of the agreement reflected the ripple-effect of the Indian brainwaves. Jayewardene nodded assent as India pressed for the accord. With the result, he is now in a hurry to clinch a new treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation with India. He wants to render the July accord more acceptable to the Sinhalese public opinion by making it more "equitable" to both sides. But that is another story altogether.

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\* The small river Rubicon was an ancient boundary between Gaul and Italy. By crossing it, Julius Caesar committed himself to a war with Pompey. In the present case, the Palk Strait would be the political Rubicon, as it were.

The July pact provided for the merger of the island's Northern and Eastern Provinces. The new and unified province would be a single Tamil entity, a vague alternative to the militants' plea for a separate State of 'Tamil Eelam'.

It was also agreed that political power would be devolved to the new Tamil province following further discussions. The package of political autonomy, fashioned in the earlier talks sponsored by India and held between the Sri Lankan adversaries, would now be expanded through new discussions. The new talks, to be held between India and Sri Lanka, were slated to resolve the "residual" issues over which no accord was reached in the earlier negotiations. As a complicating factor in the montage of complex developments since the July accord, the proposed new talks on the "residual" matters have not yet been held.

Most importantly, Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene agreed in July 1987 that there would be no finality about the proposed new Tamil province. In a referendum, scheduled for the end of 1988 at the earliest, the people of the Eastern Province could decide to remain with the north in a unified set-up or opt to break away from the Northern Province. Ironically, the question of the north-cum-east merger itself has run into rough political weather.

On another plane, India agreed to disarm the Tamil militants and keep peace. While a time schedule was drawn up for the recovery of arms from the Tamil militants, no time limit was set for the stay of the I.P.K.F. on the island. The disarming programme has run into stormy weather, while a question-mark hangs over the future of Indo-Sri Lankan relations. The uncertainty on how long the I.P.K.F. will remain in Sri Lanka has thrown up the riddle.

In July 1987, India also secured some geo-political 'gains', which we shall discuss in a subsequent chapter. While the geo-political aspects, as well as the political 'concessions' to the Tamils, have come under fire from the Sinhalese side, the Tamil militants have flayed the July accord, saying they are not a party to it. That brings us to a prime question of Indo-Sri Lankan politics today.

Why has India failed to make the Sri Lankan Tamils a party to the July accord? What is the mystery of their missing signature? First, it was perhaps unthinkable that Jayewardene would sign alongside Prabhakaran's signature, especially after the Tigers had announced their intention to take over Jaffna. In the Sri Lankan President's view, the Tigers' move was a naked bid to declare independence unilaterally. Never mind the fact that his strategy of economic blockade had subsequently taken the wind out of the Tigers' political sails some time before the July accord was reached.

If the Tamils had been asked to sign the July pact, it would have been just a scrap of paper, should Jayewardene have singled out the Tiger leader and omitted him. All this is not a mere academic discussion. It was a live issue at the time; Prabhakaran had not fallen foul of India at that stage, even if he was to fall out completely with Rajiv Gandhi a couple of months later.

India, it certainly appeared, did not want to tread on Jayewardene's toes on the question of Prabhakaran being a signatory to the July accord. No doubt, Rajiv Gandhi and Laldenga, a diehard rebel, had earlier signed a pact ending the Mizo insurgency in India. Therefore, as a parallel, India need not have been unduly worried about Jayewardene's supposed predilection against signing an accord with Prabhakaran. Yet, India was nice to Jayewardene in this respect.

There is also more to this finer point than meets the eye. India handled the Mizo rebels on its own terms, while, as a prelude to the July pact, Delhi did signal to Jayewardene not to fight the Tigers in the manner of his choice. Therefore, Jayewardene had to depend on India to deal with the Tigers, unlike in the case of Rajiv Gandhi and Laldenga who dealt with each other without outside interference. From Jayewardene's angle, there was, of course, no great point in signing an accord with Prabhakaran.

All the while, there were, no doubt, infrequent reports that Jayewardene was even trying to strike a deal with the Tigers without reference to India at all. But that was primarily a strategy to keep India on diplomatic tenterhooks. Jayewardene himself had never met Prabhakaran.

Even when Prabhakaran was called to the backstage parleys at the S.A.A.R.C. summit at Bangalore in November 1986, there was no direct dialogue between him and Jayewardene. The Tiger leader had then been summoned from Madras in style and dignity. He was indeed called for consultations at the behest of the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.G. Ramachandran, who himself had been invited by Rajiv Gandhi to be on hand during the prolonged discussions with Jayewardene.

To go back to the circumstances of the July accord, India actually prepared the agreement in a great hurry. The Sri Lankan hullabaloo over India's 'Operation Poomalai' had hustled India. Given India's diplomatic desire to clinch the July agreement in a hurry, Delhi really had no hopes of persuading all the Tamil groups to sign at short notice. After all, India had experienced much frustration on several previous occasions when trying to goad the Sri Lankan Tamil groups to attend talks. A few illustrations of India's frustration follow:

The most notable diplomatic effort prior to the July agreement related to Rajiv Gandhi's single-minded search for a pact with

Jayewardene at Bangalore in November 1986. On that occasion, the Indian Prime Minister had set his heart on clinching a diplomatic deal on the Sri Lankan Tamil problem. He held several rounds of backstage talks with Jayewardene, and, as we have just noted, called the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister from Madras for emergency consultations.

M.G. Ramachandran, in turn, called up Prabhakaran, who was accompanied by his chief political adviser, Anton Stanislaus Balasingam, as well as another political activist, Lawrence Thilagar. But the backstage parleys floundered, even as the Bangalore summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation came to a close.

At the time, Jayewardene was not prepared to countenance the idea of a merger of the island's Northern and Eastern Provinces as a reasonable alternative to the Tamil demand for a separate nation-state. In his political vision, a unified north-east province would only serve as a stepping-stone for the ultimate separation of the Tamils from the Sinhalese.

Instead, as an alternative, Jayewardene suggested that the existing Eastern Province be divided into three new provinces — one each for the Tamils, Sinhalese and the Muslims. The contours of the new provinces would be drawn up on the recommendations of a delimitation committee to be set up by the President in accordance with the terms of his new proposal.

From Jayewardene's angle, he was offering an additional province to the Tamils, in the form of the new Tamil province to be carved out of the Eastern Province. The Tamils, it may be noted, have traditionally claimed the Northern Province as their exclusive domain. Jayewardene also held out a vague assurance of an institutional linkage between the Northern Province and the proposed new Tamil province.

As a compensatory sop to the Sinhalese, the President had cleverly offered an exclusive new Sinhalese province to be sliced out of the Eastern Province. This was the farthest limit that Jayewardene was prepared to go at the 1986 SAARC summit. And Rajiv Gandhi was terribly upset at not being able to finalise an accord on that occasion.

For his part, Prabhakaran would not touch the President's proposals with a barge pole. He was only glad that, as the only Tamil spokesman to be invited to the backstage talks at that S.A.A.R.C. summit, India had now recognised him as a representative-leader of the Sri Lankan Tamils. This was a turning point in the political fortunes of Prabhakaran. Just a few days earlier in Madras, he had suffered humiliation when the Tamil Nadu police, acting on orders from M.G. Ramachandran himself, disarmed him and his men. It was a one-time operation and we will see later why the Tamil Nadu leader ordered it on the eve of the 1986 S.A.A.R.C. summit.

At Bangalore, Rajiv Gandhi was perhaps disappointed equally over the attitudes of both Jayewardene and Prabhakaran. But he was cross with Prabhakaran a trifle more than with the Sri Lankan President. The Tiger leader had rejected Jayewardene's proposals in a cavalier fashion, while still enjoying India's diplomatic hospitality. Rajiv Gandhi's disappointment was compounded by his own perception that Jayewardene's offer formed a reasonable and fair basis for further talks.

*Earlier, in July-August 1985, India had arranged the famous Sri Lanka-Tamil talks at Thimpu in Bhutan. With care and effort, the Indian diplomats shepherded the Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups, all operating from India at the time, to the Thimpu talks. The conference broke up after two rounds of futile exchanges between the representatives of the Sri Lankan Government and the island's Tamils.*

*Yet, by pressuring and persuading them to attend the Thimpu conference, Rajiv Gandhi had clearly hoped to rid the Sri Lankan Tamil militants of the label of 'terrorists'. Because, by definition, any one who talks to the very government that he is fighting against cannot be, reasonably, called a 'terrorist'.*

*It was then a sensitive phase in India's foreign relations. Rajiv Gandhi had accused Pakistan and Britain of harbouring anti-Indian Sikh terrorists. So, he was obviously keen that India should not be similarly blamed for sheltering the alleged Tamil 'terrorists'.*

*Interestingly, shortly after the Thimpu conference, I asked Rajiv Gandhi, at a press conference in Madras, whether he looked upon the Sri Lankan Tamil militant leaders as terrorists or freedom-fighters or refugees. The Indian Prime Minister replied with a smile, "As refugees". To a supplementary question on how long he would give shelter to these refugees, he remarked that India is known for its hospitality to refugees!*

*Whether refugees or not, the Sri Lankan Tamil militants, with their slippery ways, had given Rajiv Gandhi sleepless nights even when they were still operating from India. In fact, soon after the Thimpu fiasco, Prabhakaran went underground precisely when Rajiv wished to meet all the Sri Lankan Tamil guerilla leaders. It was the Tiger leader's style of protesting against the deportation of Balasingam from India. Later, of course, Balasingam was allowed to return and resume his role as the main political spokesman for the Tigers. He was asked to keep a low profile for some time, which he did.*

*And, finally when Prabhakaran left India for Jaffna shortly after plans were announced for a Tiger take-over of the administration there in January 1987, the Indian Prime Minister was further disillusioned. Subsequently, Prabhakaran was, no doubt, flown to Delhi to meet Rajiv Gandhi before he left for Colombo to sign the July accord. But the Tiger leader was called*

*only to be told of Delhi's decision to go ahead with the accord. He was not to be a prospective signatory to a pact on the political future of his own people.*

This resumé of Rajiv Gandhi's chequered equation with the Sri Lankan Tamil militants, especially Prabhakaran, would suggest that India had no reasonable hopes of carrying them with it at quick notice. Therefore, they were not given the role of a signatory to the July accord.

There is also a theory doing the rounds that the Soviet Union had a hand in guiding India to sign the July pact in a hurry. The sudden announcement of the accord, made shortly after Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Moscow, fuelled speculation on these lines. Dixit, of course, dismissed the suggestion of the Soviet factor as an "over-analysis" of the issues at stake.

What is the Soviet interest in Sri Lanka? If India, as it now appears, succeeds in keeping Sri Lanka in its own sphere of regional influence, the Soviet Union could, in turn, benefit geo-politically. The inter-play of the Soviet-Indian intentions will be discussed in a later chapter.

As a superpower, the U.S.S.R. will naturally have a stake in Sri Lankan geo-politics. Moscow may have also impressed on Delhi not to lose time and ensure that Trincomalee does not fall into the hands of the C.I.A.'s 'proxy companies'. But, by no stretch of the imagination, can the Soviet Union be held responsible for the Indian decision not to ask the Sri Lankan Tamil groups to sign the July accord. Therefore, India's rush for the July accord should be viewed differently.

It has been suggested that Rajiv Gandhi was keen on diverting Indian public opinion away from the raging domestic controversies over the alleged scandals of corruption in the purchase of the Swedish Bofors guns. Certainly, as it turned out, the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene accord did shift the Indian public gaze away from the Bofors affair. But it will be pointless to view the July pact as just a red herring in India's contemporary politics.

In fact, the decision not to associate the Sri Lankan Tamils with the July agreement as a participant-signatory has thrown up an alarming political fall-out. India has not been able to take the Tigers up the peace path, even as they feel free to flout a deed they had not signed. It has been, from the Indian standpoint, a classic dilemma of peace.

## 5

# Bees in the bonnet

**W**HAT is the view from the Sinhalese side of the ethnic divide? There is tremendous resentment against the presence of Indian troops on Sri Lankan soil. The decisive Indian commitment to the task of disarming the Tamil Tigers is sometimes recognised, but only as a cynical concession to the labours of the I.P.K.F.

No doubt, the I.P.K.F. has not stirred out of the island's Tamil region and into the Sinhalese heartland. Yet, its occasional appearance on the outer fringes of the traditional Sinhalese territories is fiercely criticised. Indeed, unlike the Tamils, the Sinhalese think of the entire island, except perhaps the Jaffna region, as their homeland, not just the areas where they preponderate. They do not accept the theory that Sri Lanka is "one country, but two nations". Nor do they wish to liken Sri Lanka to Cyprus which has two different ethnic communities, the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. Thanks to such a pan-island vision, the Sinhalese look with disfavour on the Indian military visibility in the Eastern Province, which has a demographic mix of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims.

In fact, Trincomalee in the Eastern Province has been the cynosure of Sinhalese eyes. So, President Jayewardene's commitment to Rajiv Gandhi on Trincomalee is troubling them like a bee in their political bonnet. The President has agreed that Sri Lanka will not allow Trincomalee or any other Sri Lankan port to be used by any foreign power in a manner prejudicial to India's military interests.

Shorn of the niceties of the diplomatic wordage of the July accord, the President's commitment would only mean that India will decide whether a military naval base should be set up at Trincomalee, and, if so, by whom.

Apart from the fine natural harbour which can be put to political, military and strategic uses, Trincomalee is coveted by the Sinhalese for its natural beauty which had made it a tourist haven as well.

The Sinhalese are also upset by the feeling that Jayewardene has destroyed the country's sovereignty by inviting the Indian troops to the island. His pledge on Trincomalee is regarded as a violation of Sri Lanka's sovereign rights.

*A no less sore point among the more enlightened Sinhalese is Jayewardene's undertaking that the presence of foreign intelligence and military personnel in Sri Lanka will be reviewed in consultation with India. In other words, his concession on this issue simply means that India will have the final say over the sensitive question of whether Sri Lanka can avail itself of Pakistani and Israeli military aid and advice.*

*By so allowing India to breathe down his neck, Jayewardene has indeed cast aspersions on his own cat-and-mouse diplomacy of the past. He had so transparently believed that it did not matter whether a cat (in this case, Israel or Pakistan) was black or white as long as it could catch mice (in this case, the Tamil 'terrorists'). His critics are now surprised how quickly he has chosen to pussyfoot on this issue at India's behest.*

*The Sinhalese also resent the July accord for the very simple reason that violence has escalated by leaps and bounds in their traditional territories since the signing of the agreement. No doubt, the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (J.V.P.), a banned party of Sinhalese extremists, was raising its head just before the July accord. And Jayewardene was thinking of concentrating more attention on curbing its activities. He, therefore, invited the Indian troops to disband the Tamil 'terrorists', it has been suggested. The idea was that the Sri Lankan troops, relieved by India of the duties of fighting the Tamil 'terrorists', could now be brought to the Sinhalese areas to combat the J.V.P. extremists. Following the July accord, such a redeployment of the Sri Lankan Army has indeed taken place to some extent. The Indian operation to disarm the Tamil militants has made this possible.*

*But the J.V.P. has intensified its campaign of violence, taking advantage of the general political anger against the Indo-Sri Lankan accord. So, by a curious logic, Delhi is held responsible for the renewed violence in the Sinhalese territories. The alleged imposition of an agreement on the Colombo government has refuelled the J.V.P. agitation against the Sri Lankan State itself. This argument cuts across the political barriers among the Sinhalese.*

The more politically conscious Sinhalese are of the view that India has robbed the Sri Lankan Army of a possible victory in the "fight to the finish" against the island's Tamil 'terrorists'. Of course, at the time Jayewardene announced the "fight to the finish", the Sri Lankan Army was not aware of the immense firepower of the Tamil Tigers — which came to light only when the I.P.K.F. moved against them.

Doubtless, the Sri Lankan Government was planning to use concentrated air power in the aborted "fight to the finish". To this extent, the failure of the I.P.K.F. to disarm the Tigers quickly cannot be taken as a barometer of the potential success or failure of the aborted Sri Lankan "fight to the finish". Yet, when the ill-feeling against India on this question assumed ominous proportions, it was generally believed that the Sri Lankan Government was robbed of a chance to tame the Tigers. And, once resentment of this kind sets in, it does not easily evaporate. It hasn't yet, either.

At the same time, some political forces have been at work trying to bring the healing touch to the divided people of Sri Lanka. Of them, the most heroic example is that of Vijaya Kumaranatunga, the film star-turned politician. When he was brutally assassinated by the J.V.P. extremists, he was spearheading a slowly gathering leftist force and speaking up for reason, amity and harmonious race relations.

As a tragic irony in contemporary Sri Lankan history, Kumaranatunga's funeral took place on the same day, February 21, 1988, as the one set for a maiden convention of the newly formed United Socialist Alliance. The Alliance comprises of the Communists, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and Kumaranatunga's own Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya. Kumaranatunga had also invited two Tamil militant groups, namely the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (P.L.O.T.) and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (E.P.R.L.F.). When he died, Kumaranatunga was thus taking the first decisive step towards a tentative handshake between those Sinhalese and Tamil political groups which show some sympathy towards each other.

Blazing a new trail in the island's contemporary race relations, Vijaya Kumaranatunga went far beyond his legendary namesake. Vijaya, of Sinhalese political folklore, was the pristine founder of the Sinhalese race as an inward-looking, exclusive community.

Before the present-day ethnic politics of polarisation crystallised in Sri Lanka, there was, no doubt, some political mixing between the Sinhalese and the Tamils under the umbrella of one or the other of the national parties. But such racial intermingling was never on the same scale as, say, in India.

Significantly, in this context, Kumaranatunga and his left-wing allies welcomed the July accord in the belief that it offered a ray of hope for vibrant race relations in the trouble-torn island. They also noted the "progressive" overtones of the agreement as well as the letters that Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene exchanged at the time of signing the accord.

The Sinhalese leftists have gone cock-a-hoop over Jayewardene's readiness to consult India on the question of an Israeli and Pakistani presence in Sri Lanka. The assumption of the Sri Lankan left parties is that these provisions will help keep the imperialist and reactionary Western forces at bay. India, as a leader with special political relations with the Soviet Union, would ensure that Sri Lanka does not become a cockpit of Western imperialist designs. As the leftists see it, the July accord will also insulate Trincomalee from the Western shock-waves of power politics in the Indian Ocean.

Indeed, almost a year before the July accord was signed, Kumaranatunga had spoken of his perceptions of power politics in the South Asian region. During a visit to Madras in 1986, he said the Western countries were trying to buttress Sri Lanka through aid baskets as a "buffer" against the Soviet influence in India.

Though his views smacked of a committed perception, Kumaranatunga did represent a genuine desire for inter-communal harmony. In fact, he was at the time seeking to build bridges with the Tamils by meeting the militants in Madras. Shortly thereafter, he even journeyed all the way from Colombo to Jaffna to secure the release of a few Sri Lankan soldiers from the Tigers' custody. On that occasion, he generally endeared himself to the local Tiger leaders.

He was trying to put across the message to the Tamil militants that the two communities could indeed share the island in peace and friendship. He was primarily a true representative of the ordinary Sinhalese who love good-natured fun and politics.

Outside the infra-red band of the Sri Lankan political spectrum, the reverberations of the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene pact are heard mostly in the ultra-violet, or, shall we say, the ultra-violent J.V.P. ranks who have gone on a killing spree. First, within a few weeks of the accord, Jayewardene himself came under a determined, well-planned pistol-and-grenade attack in Parliament House. He had a providential escape, while the National Security Minister, Lalith Athulathmudali, was seriously injured. A district Minister for Matara was killed in the attack which was promptly blamed on the J.V.P.

Much later, the J.V.P. gunned down the chairman of the ruling United National Party (U.N.P.). The J.V.P. has been very selective in its killings, mainly targeting the politicians belonging to Jayewardene's party. But the prime victim of the J.V.P. violence, namely Kumaranatunga, was not a member of the U.N.P., though an ardent supporter of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement. Interestingly, on the other hand, there has been no notable victim among the ranks of the main

opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, which has fiercely opposed the July accord.

Within his own party, Jayewardene has had to contend with undercurrents of opposition to the agreement. Lalith Athulathmudali, ever the Tiger baiter, often spoke out of tune with the President, but he has not carried his opposition to the point of quitting the party. Being an aspirant for the country's presidency with the election for the post due by the beginning of 1989, Athulathmudali may have thought it wise not to leave the party at this stage and spoil his chances of nomination as the presidential candidate. The Prime Minister, Ranasinghe Premadasa, has also had a very strong and abiding anti-India fixation. Yet, he too has chosen not to part ways with Jayewardene.

No doubt, Premadasa also has presidential ambitions. But, above all, the leading politicians of the U.N.P. seem to believe that they cannot afford to antagonise Jayewardene. In fact, the President is acclaimed as having the ingenuity to refashion the country's constitution and prolong his own hold on political power.

Ronnie de Mel is the man with the world record of having been the longest serving finance minister in any country. He has chosen to resign from the cabinet. But he did not cite the Indo-Sri Lankan accord as the villain of the piece. In fact, he was a behind-the-scene architect of the accord.

Ronnie de Mel's reason for resigning is that the ruling United National Party has lost the moral authority to govern the country, as it has not held a general election for a decade. Jayewardene, who first came to power as the Prime Minister in 1977, ushered in a presidential form of government the following year and anointed himself as the President. In 1982, Jayewardene gave a new lease of life to parliament through a referendum, and not a general election. In fact, some political commentators have even described the Jayewardene dispensation as a Gaullist-Bonapartist\* State.

Ronnie de Mel's outburst against the ploy of doing away with the general elections is believed to be just a political pretext. He has suddenly become acutely aware of the fact that the U.N.P. is becoming unpopular as a result of the growing disillusionment among the Sinhalese. The anti-accord politicians have projected Jayewardene's actions as a sell-out not only to India but also to the island's Tamils.

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\* The reference here is to the late French President, Charles de Gaulle, who fashioned a presidential system with authoritarian overtones. Napoleon Bonaparte, on the other hand, had systematically subdued political opposition.

Much is made of the fact that the July accord provides for the creation of a new and unified Tamil province. The proposed new Tamil entity is viewed in a larger-than-life perspective, with the fear being whipped up that a separate 'Tamil Eelam' is only a few steps away.

Of course, the clever politician that Jayewardene is, he had anticipated this argument. Therefore, even while agreeing to the unification of the largely Tamil areas, he also stipulated in the accord itself that the merger of the north and east should be ratified in a referendum in the east by the end of 1988 at the earliest.

The referendum, to be held only in the east, could even be postponed at the President's discretion. This latter provision was a concession to the Sri Lankan Tamils' sensibilities as echoed by India during Rajiv Gandhi's talks with Jayewardene when the July accord was blueprinted. The Tamils were afraid of ending up with an empty shell of a new political entity, if the referendum were to be held too soon resulting in a vote against the merger of the north and east.

But the President came under fire for having agreed to the possible postponement of the referendum. So, soon after signing the pact with Rajiv Gandhi, Jayewardene announced that he would indeed campaign against the merger during the plebiscite.

Another aspect that has aroused the ire of the average Sinhalese is the provision for provincial autonomy for the Tamils. What has been the President's reaction? Keeping his parliamentary flock together, by threatening to dissolve the house prematurely if it does not fall in line, Jayewardene has even put a constitutional amendment in the statute book on the creation of provincial councils all throughout the island.

This idea of a plurality of provincial councils is a subtle move of the President's. Here, it must be noted that he has not really proposed to create any new provinces for the Sinhalese. He has only enacted legal provisions for the governance of the existing majority-Sinhalese provinces through councils slated to enjoy the same powers as the planned council for the Tamils in a single province of their own. This move is designed to checkmate Sinhalese critics who oppose any form of political devolution to the Tamils.

But the devolution package which Jayewardene has offered is not acceptable even to moderate Tamil leaders like Amirthalingam. What has so far been pieced together in the package is as follows: The proposed unified Tamil province, like the other provinces with Sinhalese majorities, will be administered by a governor accountable to the President. The governor, in turn, will act on the aid and advice of a chief minister and a board of ministers. The provincial council will have some legislative

jurisdiction over subjects like law and order, finances etc. — within the political parameters of the country's unitary constitution. Therefore, unlike in a federation, the national government and parliament in Colombo will have the final say in the affairs of the provincial councils.

The President has not really kept his word under the July accord on the question of refining the political package for the Tamils and, by definition, for the majority-Sinhalese provinces too. He should have settled the "residual issues" to the satisfaction of India and the Sri Lankan Tamils before unfolding the devolution package. As we already know, the "residual" matters are those that have not so far been settled at the various rounds of talks between the Tamils and the Sri Lankan Government, held under India's good offices before the July accord.

The President has now said that the devolution package would be properly tied up after the proposed elections to the new provincial councils. However, in early March 1988, he postponed the proposed provincial elections in the Tamil as well as certain sensitive Sinhalese areas.

The poll deferment has put India's diplomatic clock back. Already, the failure of the I.P.K.F. to tame the Tigers quickly has complicated the situation. In fact, the enduring potential of the Tigers to disrupt the provincial elections has governed the President's decision to postpone the poll. At the other end of the Sri Lankan spectrum, the growing J.V.P. menace has upset the President's plans to hold similar elections in the key Sinhalese areas. The Ides of March, indeed!

The real reason why Jayewardene has not updated the devolution package for the Tamils is the fact that he does not want to tread on Sinhalese toes while the Tigers are not disarmed fully. The President thus finds himself caught in the coils of the July accord. He has slipped into a peace trap on a different plane too.

*To meet the criticism that he has agreed to pander to India's geo-political interests without securing any matching concessions from Delhi, Jayewardene has even sought a new treaty with Rajiv Gandhi. This was the main talking point when he visited Delhi as a State guest for the Indian Republic Day festivities on January 26, 1988.*

*For its part, India is not bending over backwards to clinch a new deal with Sri Lanka. Rajiv Gandhi is in no mood to bale Jayewardene out of the peace trap, because there is a growing demand within India for the recall of the I.P.K.F.*

*While the Indian critics maintain that neither the July pact nor the I.P.K.F. deployment serves the country's national interests, the Sinhalese suspect that Jayewardene had invited the Indian Army as a backstage bulwark against the J.V.P.*

*At the same time, India has apparently been signalling to Jayewardene in behind-the-scene messages that the very presence of its troops in the island is a trump card in its diplomatic dealings with him.*

*With all this to bother about, the President feels ensnared in a trap inadvertently laid by himself while seeking the peace accord with India. He knows he is to blame for not having done sufficient political homework on the question of reciprocity from India.*

No doubt, in reality, he has only offered to give modest political autonomy with one hand, while actually trying to take it away with the other hand. The uncertainty over how long the proposed unified Tamil province will remain intact as a single entity is his masterstroke of a make-believe concession. And, in return for the 'illusory' sops to the Tamils, he has got a solid commitment that India would respect his country's unity. Delhi has also undertaken to keep the Indian territory out of reach of the Sri Lankan Tamil militants as a base for their activities against the island republic. These are handsome gains for the Sri Lankan President.

Yet, Jayewardene feels balked of his real gains, because the presence of the Indian Army has turned into a cancer eating into the vitals of his political personality. He is in no position to dictate terms to India on this issue, though he has made noises on and off about asking the I.P.K.F. to pack up and go home. He cannot hope to wave the I.P.K.F. out of sight with a magic wand.

The J.V.P. threat cannot also be wished away by using the I.P.K.F. presence as a backstage defence ploy. Therefore, he is worried about the lack of reciprocity from India for his commitments accommodating Delhi's geo-political interests. The fact is: it is no easy matter dealing with a regional superpower when the latter chooses to play its part.

## 6

# Shadows of the past

AS the South Asian regional power, India had provided political sanctuary to the Sri Lankan Tamil militants before the July accord was fashioned. In a private conversation, Prabhakaran once recalled that his first official-level contact with the Indian Government was made when he met the sleuths of the external intelligence agency, R.A.W. He claimed that R.A.W. had invited him for a discussion which took place in Pondicherry in the presence of Balasingam, his political adviser. He was not specific as to when the meeting took place. But, clearly by that time, the then Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, had taken a policy decision to keep in touch with the Sri Lankan Tamil militants. The undeclared attributes of a regional superpower!

In fact, referring to this first meeting with the R.A.W. officials, Prabhakaran asserted that he had come to India as the acknowledged leader of the Tigers only on "invitation" from the host government itself. He made this tall claim when he was angry with the Tamil Nadu Government for seizing the Tigers' communications equipment shortly after the 1986 S.A.A.R.C. summit. He had gone on a fast demanding the return of the gadgets. And, lo and behold, the wireless sets were returned in a hurry; he then called off the fast.

It is this love-hate relationship between the Tamil Nadu Government and the Sri Lankan Tamils that forms the centrepiece of their relations with Delhi. What was the hallmark of this larger equation?

Though India had consistently denied it in the past, the Sri Lankan Tamil militants themselves often admitted in private conversations that they had received training in the use of arms at camps on the Indian soil. In a secret E.R.O.S. document, it has also been mentioned that India had given T.E.L.O. the largest consignments of arms. Indian military intelligence officials had even gone to Sri Lanka in the guise of T.E.L.O. fighters, it was further stated in the E.R.O.S. document.

While all this relates to the pre-July accord period, India itself has now indirectly conceded its secret connections with the Sri Lankan Tamils in the past. How? The Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene accord has committed India not to allow the Sri Lankan Tamil militants the use of Indian territory any longer. This is more than an opaque admission of India's past links with the Eelam separatists.

It must be stated that all the indirect references in the July accord lead to an inference, and not a self-indictment of India. All the same, Delhi is perhaps no longer worried about the inference. Because India's military presence in the island is, in itself, a pointer to Delhi's regional power status. And superpowers, like the United States and the Soviet Union, make no bones about their intervention in their respective neighbourhoods — the U.S. in Central America and the U.S.S.R. in Afghanistan, to cite just two examples, notwithstanding the Geneva accord of April 1988, on Soviet withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan.

But the point here is that Jayewardene feels vindicated in his consistent claims that India has been poking its nose in his country's affairs. Yet, it cannot be contradicted that Delhi's backstage participation in the Sri Lankan politics began only after the Tamils from that country came to India in large numbers, following the anti-Tamil riots of 1983. Further, as the Sri Lankan Government intensified its drive against the Tamil separatists, more refugees streamed into India. Well over a hundred thousand of them poured into India, wave after wave.

A substantial number of them opted to stay with their friends and relatives in Madras and elsewhere in Tamil Nadu. As a result, those who made a bee-line for the refugee camps never equalled the number of those who had flocked to India from the then East Pakistan in the late 1960s and early 1970s — a scenario which finally set the stage for India's liberation of Bangladesh. But West Bengal, the Indian State with ethnic affinities with the East Pakistanis, never hit the international headlines in the same manner in which Tamil Nadu has now done in the case of the Sri Lankan Tamil militants.

Jayewardene often blamed the Tamil Nadu Government of the late M.G. Ramachandran for queering the political pitch for the Indian Government. The 'hate-India' brigade among the Sinhalese people portray the Tamil Nadu role as a typical case of the tail wagging the dog — Tamil Nadu being the tail and the Indian Government the dog. All this insinuation against Tamil Nadu, with Jayewardene seeming to agree, was hurled at M.G. Ramachandran before the July accord and for some time thereafter. But the shadows of the past are still with us.

M.G. Ramachandran, who passed away on Christmas Eve, 1987, was indeed a patron-saint of the Sri Lankan Tamil militants, especially the Tigers. Yet, freak tendencies some times featured his relations with the Tigers and other militants.

Till almost the very end of his life, he had a special political equation with Prabhakaran, with their ties finally taking a sour turn some time after the outbreak of the Indo-Tiger war in October 1987.

When, in July 1987, Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene were rushing into a mutual embrace, M.G. Ramachandran, still suffering from a speech impediment following a cerebral stroke, even briefed Prabhakaran, as he was being flown by the Indian authorities from Jaffna to Delhi — an event already discussed. Prabhakaran met M.G.R. in Madras on his way to Delhi. It was one of the last occasions he was to see M.G.R. Apparently, M.G.R. advised the Tiger leader to swim with the Rajiv Gandhi tide towards a peace accord.

Subsequently, M.G.R. went away to the U.S. for a periodical medical check-up. He was not on the scene in Tamil Nadu when the Indo-Tiger war broke out. During the absence of M.G.R. at this critical stage, Prabhakaran obviously felt orphaned. When the I.P.K.F. really turned the heat on him, he was dismayed that the people of Tamil Nadu would not raise the banner of revolt against the Indian military action. Innocent Sri Lankan Tamil civilians suffered heavy casualties. Yet, M.G.R. now in the U.S., did not raise his little finger against Delhi's action.

At this critical moment in his career, Prabhakaran desperately began looking elsewhere for support in Tamil Nadu. He sent letters to various political leaders in the State, seeking their support in the Indo-Tiger war. A letter was duly sent to the opposition Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader, M. Karunanidhi, as well. In the internal politics of Tamil Nadu, M.G.R. held the extraordinary view that Karunanidhi was the root cause of all political evils. So, when Prabhakaran, for the first time, made an approach to Karunanidhi, M.G.R., still in the U.S., did not relish it one bit. And, when he died shortly on his return from the U.S., M.G.R. was an embittered man, sore with Prabhakaran.

*M.G.R. had taken kindly to Prabhakaran, in the first place, for the simple reason that he did not befriend Karunanidhi, a parallel rallying centre of political attraction in Tamil Nadu. In other words, M.G.R. had never really looked at the nuances of international politics when he backed Prabhakaran. According to knowledgeable sources, what impressed M.G.R. the most before the July accord was that, like a truly wedded wife, Prabhakaran chose to stay with him, instead of seeking out Karunanidhi. All this while, the Indian Government itself was generally hospitable to*

Prabhakaran as well as the other Sri Lankan Tamil militants. So, M.G.R. had no pangs of political conscience when he threw his weight behind Prabhakaran.

But Delhi finally decided not to let the Tamil Nadu Government tinker with the country's foreign policy on Sri Lanka. This aspect came into full play by the time the July accord was conceived.

Be that as it may, Prabhakaran was trying, even at that late stage, to make the best of a bad bargain, from his standpoint. So, even as M.G.R. was asked by the Indian Prime Minister to persuade the Tigers to fall in line, Prabhakaran was still unyielding. But Delhi, too, would not budge. M.G.R. threw up his hands in despair, and Prabhakaran was a confused man. At the time, the Tiger leader was still groping towards his latter-day strategy. This, as we have seen, was a two-stage tactical operation. He would first give the impression of accepting India's new peace-keeping role; then try later to ease the I.P.K.F. out of Sri Lanka.

Rajiv Gandhi, for his part, was banking heavily on M.G.R. to put pressure on Prabhakaran to accept India's new role as the peace-keeper in Sri Lanka. It was recognised that M.G.R. alone possessed the potential to shape public opinion in Tamil Nadu either for or against Delhi's moves at the time.

Of course, Rajiv Gandhi himself was trying a host of political tricks, including the offer of money to rehabilitate the Tigers should they agree to lay down arms and abide by the July accord, then in the melting pot. More of that later; we are now on the triangular equation between Delhi, Tamil Nadu and the Tigers.

Significantly, as the countdown for the July accord began, M.G.R. himself revised his equation with Prabhakaran, though only at a slow pace. Prabhakaran was apparently not aware of the changing mood of M.G.R. Of course, he did realise that M.G.R. was now twisting his arm in a gentle manner. This, in itself, was a far cry from the days of the 1986 S.A.A.R.C. summit, when M.G.R. did not hustle him unduly over the question of a political settlement with the Sri Lankan authorities.

So, when Prabhakaran finally decided to raise the war cry against the I.P.K.F. a couple of months after the July accord, he chose to pin his hopes on M.G.R., confident that the latter would raise his voice against the Indo-Tiger war. Clearly, Prabhakaran was, at this stage, banking on the memories of munificence which M.G.R. had showered on him earlier.

This takes us back to a few weeks before the July accord, May 1987, to be precise. M.G.R. unilaterally announced a contribution of 30 million Indian rupees to the Tigers and IRs. 10 million to E.R.O.S. A statement on the subject was made on the floor of the Tamil Nadu Assembly by Panrutti S. Ramachandran, a trusted lieutenant of M.G.R. on the Sri Lankan issue.

The Tamil Nadu gift, in fact, caused the second serious embarrassment to the Indian Government over its Sri Lanka policy. We will discuss the first embarrassment a little later.

When M.G.R. announced the lavish gift of IRs. 40 million, Jayewardene and his cohorts lost no time in accusing India of openly admitting its complicity in the island's internal affairs. So, when on the eve of the July accord, Rajiv Gandhi sought the help of M.G.R., the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister had to be careful not to embarrass Delhi again by championing Prabhakaran's cause beyond a point of acceptability to the Indian Prime Minister.

At this stage, M.G.R. was also perhaps losing his political stamina. He had suffered a crippling stroke in October 1984. Doubtless, he recovered miraculously, regaining all his faculties except for a speech impairment. Yet, the affairs of State were a strain on his frail health, and he could not exert himself to persuade Prabhakaran beyond a point. He was disappointed that Prabhakaran would not readily accept the idea of instant peace. The Tiger leader's insistence on a lion's share in the proposed interim council, in the event of peace in the island's Tamil-majority region, also upset M.G.R.

Interestingly, M.G.R. had earlier recognised the Tigers and E.R.O.S. as the twin representatives of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Yet, he could not accept Prabhakaran's demands on the eve of the July accord. The reason is not far to seek. His selective patronage of the Tigers had come under Delhi's adverse scrutiny. Delhi is believed to have asked him why he gift-wrapped IRs. 40 million to the Tigers and E.R.O.S.

For the record, the Indian Government no doubt, supported M.G.R. on this issue, while rejecting Colombo's protest note. That raises the question why M.G.R. announced the relief in the first place. In May 1987, the Tigers had suffered a major reverse during the Sri Lankan armed forces' offensive in the Vadamarachi region. Innocent Tamil civilians had suffered grievously at the time, it was noted in Madras. Now, M.G.R. had the reputation of being a Good Samaritan who would rush to the rescue of people affected by fire accidents or other calamities. In tune with his image and impulses, he readily went to the rescue of the Tigers and their tactical ally, E.R.O.S.

A pertinent question that would naturally crop up is why he did not give the aid package to the Sri Lankan Tamil civilians themselves who had survived the Vadamarachi offensive. The answer is that such aid from an Indian State could not be distributed on foreign soil. M.G.R. had no precedents to go by. Delhi's idea of a real-life pie-in-the-sky mission had not yet been thought of when M.G.R. announced his generous gift.

On the other hand, the Tigers and E.R.O.S. who were then operating from Indian territory, could be reckoned as the defenders of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Moreover, logistically, the money could be easily given to them on Indian soil itself.

When the gift was announced, Prabhakaran had long since left India, without even informing M.G.R. But Prabhakaran's adviser, Balasingam, had remained in India — till almost the outbreak of the Indo-Tiger war. It was Balasingam who explained to M.G.R. the circumstances in which Prabhakaran had had to rush to Jaffna in early January 1987. Prabhakaran too kept himself in touch with M.G.R. of his own accord, using Balasingam as his messenger. So, when M.G.R. announced the relief package, his equation with Prabhakaran had come back on an even keel.

Preparing the ground for the announcement, Panrutti S. Ramachandran tore to pieces the speech made by the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Premadasa, in his country's parliament some time earlier. Premadasa had spoken of the Sinhalese majority as "our people", thereby treating the Sri Lankan Tamils as the other people, Ramachandran charged. Talking of the "law of the jungle" as reflected in the Sri Lankan Government's aerial bombardment of the Tamils, the Tamil Nadu Minister even drew attention to the "fascist" tendencies of the Colombo regime.

S. Ramachandran treated the Tamil Nadu Assembly to a speech delivered with punch and panache. Earlier, in December 1983, he had raised the Sri Lankan Tamil issue at the United Nations, when he was deputed to it by the late Indira Gandhi, at the suggestion of M.G.R. himself.

While the Tamil Nadu Minister's speech at the U.N. did warm the cockles of Delhi's diplomatic heart, M.G.R. acted with a mind of his own on a different occasion, much to the chagrin of the Indian Government. Here, we take up the first major embarrassment that M.G.R. had caused Delhi on the Sri Lankan issue.

It was on the eve of the 1986 S.A.A.R.C. summit. All of a sudden, M.G.R. ordered the State police and intelligence authorities to swoop down on the Sri Lankan militants and disarm them. Even Prabhakaran was not spared.

Why did M.G.R. do that? A few weeks earlier, on the Hindu festival day of Deepavali, the self-styled commander of the E.P.R.L.F. had killed an Indian civilian following a street brawl in Madras. There was a public outcry. Ostensibly, M.G.R. was keen to signal to the people of Tamil Nadu that he would not let the Sri Lankan Tamil militants take the Indian law into their own hands. Hence, his fiat to disarm the Eelam militants.

But his action produced a ripple effect of a different kind. An effect he had not anticipated. Delhi was embarrassed, as the so-called 'Operation Disarm', M.G.R.'s brainwave, was quickly seized upon by the Sri Lankan Government as evidence that India was harbouring armed Sri Lankan Tamil militants.

When M.G.R. ordered the one-time 'Operation Disarm', he was already cross with Prabhakaran who did not turn up for a briefing session with him. At that session, M.G.R. unfolded the latest in a series of political proposals which the Sri Lankan Government had made a short while earlier. Prabhakaran did not attend the meeting, saying that he was not well. But political observers suspected that it was a case of diplomatic illness, as it were.

In any case, Prabhakaran was then making up his mind about taking over the civil administration in Jaffna from the following January. Apparently he was wary of spilling the beans on this subject if he were to meet M.G.R. on that occasion. It is, of course, a different story that Prabhakaran subsequently decided to postpone the formation of an 'Eelam secretariat' in Jaffna.

M.G.R. was not happy with the Tigers on yet another occasion. It was a few days after the 1986 S.A.A.R.C. summit. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister was a witness to the intransigence of the Tiger leader at the backstage parleys at the S.A.A.R.C. summit. So, to prove the point that Prabhakaran could not take him for granted, M.G.R. ordered the seizure of the Tigers' communications equipment. It was with these gadgets that the Tigers were keeping themselves in close touch with their comrades in Sri Lanka. The sophisticated telecom kits were actually a key part of the Tigers' armoury.

Protesting against the seizure of this wireless equipment, Prabhakaran went on a lightning fast. M.G.R. now ordered that the equipment be returned. By then, Prabhakaran had fasted for just about 24 hours, and M.G.R. had also made his point that he was the boss in Tamil Nadu.

All the same, the equation between M.G.R. and Prabhakaran was one of political warmth. In fact, it is widely believed that Prabhakaran had obtained the political blessings of M.G.R. while going underground to avoid meeting Rajiv Gandhi. As noted elsewhere, the Tiger leader had thus disappointed Rajiv Gandhi soon after the collapse of the Thimpu conference in 1985. At the time, Prabhakaran was smarting under an 'insult' at the hands of the Indian Government. Delhi had just then deported Balasingam from India, besides also ordering S.C. Chandrasekaran, a non-militant Sri Lankan Tamil leader, to leave India.

The deportation of Chandrahasan caused a furore in Tamil Nadu, mainly because he is the son of S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, one of the fathers of the Sri Lankan Tamil movement. The D.M.K. leader, Karunanidhi, was quickly in the vanguard of the protest over Chandrahasan's deportation. The agitators picked up the theme of the treatment meted out to Balasingam as well. But the Balasingam affair did not receive the same attention as the row over Chandrahasan. Apparently, the fact that Balasingam is a British passport-holder had something to do with the level of protest. Moreover, Karunanidhi and the Tigers were poles apart at the time.

Delhi had acted without consulting the M.G.R. government. So, Prabhakaran, his political feathers ruffled over the Balasingam issue, set out to prove a point by going underground. For his part, M.G.R. was already upset that Karunanidhi was orchestrating the public outcry over Chandrahasan's deportation. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, therefore, merely looked the other way when Prabhakaran gave Delhi the slip.

*By now, the Sri Lankan Tamil separatist struggle had become a plaything in Tamil Nadu politics. Karunanidhi was backing T.E.L.O. primarily because he could not play the patron of Prabhakaran. Cleverly, the Tiger commander-in-chief had befriended M.G.R., taking into account the latter's pivotal position as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and his phenomenal sway over the people.*

*When T.E.L.O. was virtually liquidated as a fighting force in the Sri Lankan Tamil region by the middle of May 1986, Karunanidhi realised that he had backed the wrong horse, though T.E.L.O. was a well-known organisation when he first extended his support to it.*

*Later, when Karunanidhi kicked up political dust over a host of domestic issues, such as the alleged imposition of the Hindi language on the people of Tamil Nadu, fiery violence marred his campaigns. There was a series of bomb blasts in several parts of the State. At this, M.G.R. ordered the State police to investigate the possibility of T.E.L.O.'s hand, acting either on its own or in collusion with the D.M.K. chief.*

*To be fair, it must be said that the D.M.K. has been consistently focusing attention on the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamils, despite the initial disadvantage of not being able to jump on to the Prabhakaran bandwagon. So, much so, when the Indo-Tiger war broke out, the D.M.K. promptly figured in the Tigers' political calculus. Now, when Prabhakaran wrote to Karunanidhi, the latter responded with much glee and some sense of pride. The Indo-Tiger war has indeed given Karunanidhi a major talking point in the political debates in Tamil Nadu. This is especially so after the State came under the Indian President's rule towards the end of January 1988.*

*From that time, Karunanidhi has raised the tempo of his campaign against the I.P.K.F.'s "atrocities" in the course of the continuing Indo-Tiger confrontation.*

*In the past, before Rajiv Gandhi clinched the July pact, the Sri Lankan Tamil separatists used to say that "Sri Lanka is not a State, but a slaughter house". This eerie usage was later picked up by the D.M.K., and other parties of its ilk, following the outbreak of the Indo-Tiger war.*

*Karunanidhi has been demanding a halt to India's military operations against the Tigers. And he is not alone, as some Indian national opposition leaders like V.P. Singh and Chandrasekhar have also asked Delhi to recall the I.P.K.F. from Sri Lanka. Their contention is that the July accord and the I.P.K.F. deployment do not serve any of India's enlightened self-interests.*

In Tamil Nadu itself, comparatively less popular politicians like P. Nedumaran have been harping on the rights of the Sri Lankan Tamils without any let-up. As early as in 1983, he set out on a land-and-sea 'march' to Sri Lanka to "save" the Tamils there from "Sinhalese-organised genocide". Of course, his bizarre sea 'march' did not come off. Yet, he attracted a lot of international media attention.

Now, in 1988, other, and relatively new, politicians in Tamil Nadu have picked up the political threads of public debate over the Sri Lankan Tamil problem. The latest to join the club of pro-'Eelam Tamil' politicians is Jayalalitha, leader of one of the two factions of the party left behind by the late M.G.R. She claims to have talked to some of the Tiger representatives. The process of establishing peace in the Sri Lankan Tamil areas cannot be given a meaningful thrust if the Tigers are to be excluded, she says. Her observations have raised many a political eyebrow, since she is believed to be a 'natural ally' of Rajiv Gandhi, though she blows hot and cold over the question of her political relations with Rajiv Gandhi's Congress (Indira) party.

Jayalalitha may have merely wished to join issue with the D.M.K. leader, in view of the imminent general elections to the Tamil Nadu Assembly. But it is clear that the Sri Lankan Tamil issue will continue to loom large on the State's political horizon even after the death of M.G.R.

In fact, as mentioned elsewhere, the Indian political and military intelligence authorities are now investigating Prabhakaran's supposed intentions to impose his political will over Tamil Nadu too in the long run. The idea of a 'greater Eelam', encompassing the Sri Lankan and Indian Tamil territories, is believed to have been on the political agenda of the deceased T.E.L.O. leader, Siri Sabaratnam, as well. The past political nexus between T.E.L.O. and the D.M.K. may now undergo

a transformation, with Karunanidhi and Prabhakaran entering into a political honeymoon of convenience, it is suspected in some Indian intelligence quarters.

All this would only show that Prabhakaran, with Indian and Sri Lankan blood on his hands, is still 'shining' as a blood-red star over Tamil Nadu.

## 7

## Grisly guerilla games

**W**HAT is the secret of the Tigers' status as a premier militant-political organisation? The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, to give their full name, is primarily a brain-child of Prabhakaran's. He has developed it to the extent of being able to defy the world's fourth largest army, namely the Indian Army. Of course, in the Indo-Tiger war, his organisation has benefitted from Delhi's orders to the I.P.K.F. not to use air power and heavy artillery in the operation to free Jaffna city. And, after making a tactical exit from Jaffna, the Tiger leaders have concentrated on the more classical forms of guerilla warfare.

Now, even if he is tracked down by the Indian Army, Prabhakaran would have proved his mettle as a guerilla leader. From the Indian viewpoint, he may be fighting a largely pointless battle with the I.P.K.F. But, when he started his guerilla career, he was by no means an aimless vagabond of the jungles. He gathered strength by articulating the Sri Lankan Tamils' grievances against the Colombo regime. Today, his passion for political power overlaps the demand for the Sri Lankan Tamils' rights, to the point of blurring the distinction between his passion and the Tamil demands.

He was in control of Jaffna when the Indian peace force landed in Sri Lanka in the wake of the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene agreement. He had, no doubt, lost a battle, but not the war, in the Vadamarachi region shortly before the arrival of the I.P.K.F. He could still hold his head high because his control of Jaffna was intact.

He was collecting taxes, raising five million Sri Lankan rupees every month in Jaffna city alone. The taxes were imposed as a means to fight the war being waged against the Sri Lankan Government so that the Sri Lankan Tamils could gain their political rights. So, when the I.P.K.F. moved in, the world around Prabhakaran collapsed, as he could no longer

hope to lord it over Jaffna. His cherished ambition of carving out a 'Tamil Eelam' was also reined in by the Indian move to step on to the Sri Lankan stage.

Understanding his sense of deprivation, India ultimately offered his organisation a prominent position in the interim council. But, precisely at that moment, Prabhakaran chose to provoke India, and the Indo-Tiger war erupted, as discussed earlier.

The die, however, appears to have been cast even earlier. Let us assume that he could have perhaps pulled back from the brinkmanship of provoking India. But this was impossible, because he could not brush aside the hard-liners in his own camp, who were always opposed to any deal with India. People like his deputy, Mahendraraja, who had never really interacted intensively with the Indian authorities before the July accord, were cast in a different mould. In the days before the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene agreement, when Prabhakaran was living in India, his critics spread the story that he was keeping himself away from the war zone for fear of his own life. He sought to prove them wrong by rushing back to Jaffna at the beginning of 1987. Once there, he could not easily accept India's liquidation of the Tigers' regime in Jaffna. Perhaps his own life would have come under a cloud, if he had not opposed India in these circumstances.

So, Prabhakaran's decision to go to war with India was partly influenced by the need to keep the hard-liners in his camp in good humour. If this was an emergency in his political life, he had faced an emergency of a different kind when he hurried across the Palk Strait to make his presence felt in Jaffna in January 1987. The then Jaffna regional commander of the Tigers, Krishnakumar, alias Kittu, had gone ahead with preparations for taking over Jaffna. A short while earlier, Prabhakaran, still in India, had indeed postponed the Jaffna take-over for "practical reasons". He did seem to have responded to the diplomatic pressure from India not to precipitate matters by the move to establish political control over Jaffna.

But Prabhakaran was not looking at Jaffna through India's political prism alone. He was, at the time, trying to liquidate the E.P.R.L.F. To him, this was clearly a priority adventure. Not surprisingly, therefore, he wanted to defer the Jaffna take-over. Kittu's enthusiasm for the take-over bid had to be tempered by realism as Prabhakaran saw it.

The Sri Lankan Government, nevertheless, reacted quickly to Kittu's tentative move to take over Jaffna. An economic blockade was imposed on Jaffna and Jayewardene intensified the aerial raids over the Sri Lankan Tamil population. As a result, Prabhakaran was forced to

slow down his offensive against the E.P.R.L.F. This was a setback for which the Tiger leader was not fully prepared at the time.

Going back to the Jaffna scene in January 1987, it should be noted that Prabhakaran's hurried return to Jaffna from Madras had some other political overtones as well. Obviously he did not want to miss the bus to political power in Jaffna, where he could hope to share the 'spoils' after the planned take-over.

In a sense, the premier position which Prabhakaran has been accorded by even the new breed of Tamil Nadu politicians, like Jayalalitha, could be traced to the Tigers' hold over Jaffna prior to the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene agreement. Though Kittu and Prabhakaran had clearly been on different political wavelengths over the timing of the Jaffna take-over operation, the Tiger supremo went along with Kittu for tactical reasons.

On the question of supremacy as the most successful separatist group, the Tigers had made it clear to all their rival groups that they could not hope to be even a second best by a long shot. In May 1986, the Tigers systematically overpowered T.E.L.O. even murdering its leader, Siri Sabaratnam.

T.E.L.O. was, in a sense, buttressed by India, ostensibly because some of the best known names among the earlier breed of Sri Lankan Tamil militants belonged to this organisation. Kuttimani and Thangadurai are heroic names in 'Eelam Tamil' militant history. They had held the stage before Prabhakaran projected himself and emerged as a better-known political-guerilla leader. Both perished in the massacre at Welikade prison, when Sinhalese prisoners went on the rampage against imprisoned Tamils during the anti-Tamil riots of 1983.

There was another militant activist, Sivakumaran by name, who preceded these two men in Sri Lankan Tamil folklore. Sivakumaran committed suicide and wrote his way into the hearts of the Eelam Tamils by that 'brave' act in the face of adversity at the hands of the "racist" Sinhalese.

The purpose here is not to trace the history of the guerilla movement among the Sri Lankan Tamils. The focus simply is on how the Tigers, who have given India such a political headache, rose to prominence in the period immediately preceding the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene pact.

The Tigers' relations with the other militant organisations have undergone quite a few changes. Their only ally, that too a tactical ally, has been E.R.O.S., whose leader is Balakumar. He often speaks up for the so-called Indian, or plantation, Tamils in Sri Lanka in addition to his own Eelam Tamils. Realising the realpolitik significance of aligning

with the Tigers when the latter rode to the top, Balakumar kept himself on the right side of M.G.R. After the Indo-Tiger war broke out, E.R.O.S. began to distance itself from the Tigers without really tripping over their tails and inviting their roar.

As for their mutual relations before the July accord, the Tigers befriended E.R.O.S. for the simple reason of seeking an ally in the Eastern Province. The Tigers were not prominent in the east until very recently, in fact until after the Indo-Tiger war erupted.

E.R.O.S. was originally an expatriate association formed in London. When it stepped on to the Sri Lankan political stage, it slowly but surely analysed that an advance towards 'Tamil Eelam' could not be made without taking into account the ascendancy of the Tigers.

At one stage, E.R.O.S. began to wonder whether the Tigers, in befriending it, were only trying to wean it away from the other key militant groups. If that be true, the Tigers would have merely hoped to enfeeble and eliminate the Eelam National Liberation Front. Formed in 1984, the E.N.L.F. was a grouping of T.E.L.O., E.R.O.S. and the E.P.R.L.F., with the Tigers joining later and opting for the status of an associate member.

E.R.O.S. was all the while conscious of the power and potential of the Tigers. In fact, it even suspected that the Tigers perhaps wanted to smother it in due course of time, through a feigned tiger-hug of affection, as it were. Yet, E.R.O.S. was not afraid of aligning itself with the Tigers, because it was confident that, unlike in the case of the other groups, the Tigers would not be able to accuse it of being an anti-social organisation.

Moreover, E.R.O.S. felt that the Tigers would find it difficult to give it a death-blow. In the Eastern Province, the E.R.O.S. cadres had established some rapport with the ordinary people, a factor which the Tigers could not ignore. So, E.R.O.S. tried to run with the timid E.N.L.F. and hunt with the ferocious tiger, so to speak.

Of course, E.R.O.S. was none the worse for its decision. Indeed, when M.G.R. openly sanctioned IRs. 40 million to the militants, it got one-fourth of the gift.

As for the Tigers' overall strategy, they openly sought to eliminate the other major groups such as T.E.L.O., P.L.O.T. and the E.P.R.L.F. Of these, P.L.O.T. and the E.P.R.L.F. made attempts in February 1988 to sail with the United Socialist Alliance, which the late Vijaya Kumaranatunga had formed shortly before he was gunned down by the J.V.P. In this new situation, the E.P.R.L.F. has also secured recognition from the Sri Lankan Election Commission as a political party.

*P.L.O.T. is another organisation in search of a political identity in every day politics. Its leader, Uma Maheswaran, has had a love-hate relationship with Prabhakaran. P.L.O.T. has indeed split, but Uma Maheswaran, who sometimes spoke of a pan-island leftist movement, has generally symbolised the P.L.O.T. cult.*

*In the past, Uma Maheswaran was, for a while, the secretary of the Colombo branch of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front, T.U.L.F. for short. In contrast, Prabhakaran was never formally associated with the T.U.L.F. Yet, both men were in touch with the T.U.L.F. leader, Appapillai Amirthalingam.*

*At one stage, Prabhakaran and Uma Maheswaran were quite friendly towards each other, even planning to work together as militant leaders. It was then that they approached Amirthalingam for help in raising financial resources. As the two were, at the time, claiming the informal status of refugees in Tamil Nadu, Amirthalingam is understood to have given them a letter of general appeal, which was addressed to expatriate Tamils all over the world. An account number in a Madras bank, standing in the name of 'Mukundan', was also mentioned in the appeal for funds. Amirthalingam is said to have made this gesture some time in the late 1970s.*

*Soon thereafter, Prabhakaran and Maheswaran fell out in a personality clash. Prabhakaran is then understood to have immediately raced to Amirthalingam with a request for the issuance of a fresh appeal for funds. The Tiger leader explained that he and Maheswaran had now parted ways. The previous appeal was in favour of 'Mukundan', said to be a "false" name for Maheswaran. Therefore, he could no longer share the funds already obtained, Prabhakaran said. Hence, the need for another appeal.*

*According to this version in closed-circuit Sri Lankan Tamil quarters, Amirthalingam readily obliged Prabhakaran by handing him a new appeal as requested.*

*On both occasions, Amirthalingam had not addressed the appeal to any foreign government. Nor did he appeal for assistance for guerilla activities directed against the Sri Lankan State. He had only issued a general appeal, citing how the Sri Lankan Tamils were forced to seek refuge outside their country.*

*Not long thereafter, there was a shoot-out between Prabhakaran and Maheswaran on a busy street in Madras in mid-1982. They were arrested by the Tamil Nadu police for a breach of the peace. The Sri Lankan Government promptly wanted them to be extradited to stand trial for offences allegedly committed in the island.*

*It was a part of Prabhakaran's campaign to terrorise fellow-Tamils who cooperated with the Colombo authorities. In the course of these*

activities, Prabhakaran was believed to have murdered Alfred Duraiappa, the Mayor of Jaffna, some years earlier. This was one of the offences for which Colombo wanted Prabhakaran to stand trial.

When Maheswaran and Prabhakaran were in custody in India, Amirthalingam is said to have played a behind-the-scenes role in securing bail for both of them. Ironically, in late 1986, Prabhakaran called Amirthalingam a "traitor" to the Tamil cause and narrated an incident that had supposedly taken place when he was in Tamil Nadu police custody in 1982.

According to Prabhakaran, Amirthalingam told him that Colombo's proposal for district councils could be used by the Tamils as a tactical springboard for a greater say in their own affairs at a later stage. More importantly, the Tiger leader said, Amirthalingam tried to deflect him from the Eelam path by playing Jayewardene's game.

Amirthalingam is said to have fielded a relative of Prabhakaran to convey to the latter Jayewardene's offer of political amnesty. But Prabhakaran would not bite the bait. At that time, the Tamil militant ranks were in disarray, and Amirthalingam's act of conveying Colombo's so-called amnesty offer was a betrayal of the Tamil cause, Prabhakaran charged. For his part, Amirthalingam refuted this charge when it was brought to his attention.

Be that as it may, Prabhakaran's enemy-equation with Maheswaran took on new wings. But for the fact that P.L.O.T. disintegrated in nearly an inverse proportion to the rise of the Tigers, Prabhakaran would have come into conflict with P.L.O.T. first rather than with T.E.L.O.

Under the late Siri Sabaratnam T.E.L.O. had wormed its way into the good books of the Indian intelligence agencies, especially R.A.W. At least, this was the unchanging gossip in Sri Lankan Tamil quarters in Madras, at the height of their activities on Indian soil.

Indeed, according to an internal document of E.R.O.S., which the Tigers laid their hands on, it was a fact that T.E.L.O. was the biggest beneficiary of India's military benevolence towards the Sri Lankan Tamils. At the time, in May 1986, the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene pact was an unthinkable proposition. The Tigers were quite sore that T.E.L.O. was the blue-eyed boy of the Indian authorities.

Eventually, the Tiger-T.E.L.O. battle broke out. The Tigers captured most of the weapons which T.E.L.O. possessed. And, in private talks, the Tigers even gloated that they had obtained the India-supplied weapons, thanks to T.E.L.O.'s incompetence in using them.

In these conversations, the Tigers did not deny that they too had received arms from India. But only on a small scale, they said. Of course, India has consistently denied giving weapons to any Sri Lankan Tamil group.

What were the differences between T.E.L.O. and the Tigers? Surely, there was no ideological rift. Yet the two were just not Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

Their clashes could only be explained as a power struggle. It was about this time that Delhi began to back the Sri Lankan Tamil militants' cause more actively than ever before. Therefore, the clashes were timed to a nicety to drive home the point that the Tigers alone mattered the most among the motley Sri Lankan Tamil groups. Interestingly, Balasingam once made a tongue-in-cheek remark, "Power struggle is a fascinating theory. But we do not endorse it". The Sri Lankan Tamil militants have, nevertheless, played grisly guerilla games.

There seems to have been a stage when the E.P.R.L.F. also befriended the Tigers. But, when the Tigers carried out a blood-chilling massacre of Sinhalese in Anuradhapura in late 1984, the E.P.R.L.F. changed its attitude towards the Tigers. Anuradhapura is a bastion of Sinhalese culture.

To curry favour with the 'progressive' elements among the Sinhalese, the E.P.R.L.F. is supposed to have chosen to condemn the Tigers for the mayhem in Anuradhapura. This set the Tigers and the E.P.R.L.F. on a collision course. Eventually, Prabhakaran planned to launch an all-out offensive against the E.P.R.L.F., but this was aborted when Colombo retaliated against Kittu's Jaffna take-over bid, as we have noted.

This, in short, is the story of the Tigers' ascendancy to militant supremacy in Sri Lankan Tamil affairs. It was, no doubt, a bloody path to success. But Prabhakaran had indeed worked hard, motivating his followers and reshaping his plans from time to time to meet the changing situation.

His singular lead-role in the ambush of Sri Lankan soldiers in a suburb of Jaffna in mid-1983 served as a shot in the arm for his organisation. It soon became a magnet for new recruits, who were then trained vigorously.

*In September 1984, Prabhakaran launched War Cry, a periodical in Tamil on matters of military science. It was for circulation only among the Tigers.*

*The inaugural issue emphasised how essential it was to impart military knowledge to the Sri Lankan Tamils. It was said the Tamils had not resisted either Western imperialism or Sinhalese hegemonism by bearing arms over the centuries. Being the "first" publication of its kind in the Tamil language, the inaugural issue also carried a stirring account of the Dien Bien Phu battle, which was the crowning glory of the Viet Minh guerillas in Vietnam. The narration was punctuated by thumb-nail sketches of Ho Chi Minh and Gen. Giap, the revolutionary leaders of Vietnamese communism.*

புலிகளின்  
**பொர்க்குரல்**

விடுதலைப் புலிகளின் கிராணுவ விஞ்ஞானஞ

4



*Facsimile of the front cover of an issue of 'Pörkkural' (or 'War Cry'), an internal publication of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.*

*This and the subsequent issues of War Cry explained to the Tigers how to use different types of weapons and how to plan and sustain various guerilla tactics. The succeeding volumes were widely illustrated and punctuated by occasional descriptions of successful guerilla wars elsewhere in the world. The lessons on the use of weapons were generally translations from publications in foreign languages.*

*These educative volumes on matters of military science were designed to prepare the Tigers for an all-out guerilla war. But Prabhakaran himself was a self-taught guerilla leader. There is no evidence so far that he himself had received training from any other established guerilla organisation. Of course, after the Indo-Tiger war erupted, some Indian officials claimed to have unearthed a letter supposedly written by Prabhakaran to the Libyan leader, Col. Gaddafi. But India itself has not carried this theory to a logical conclusion.*

*Interestingly, on the other hand, the general belief among the Sri Lankan Tamils is that Prabhakaran's latter-day arch rival, Uma Maheswaran of P.L.O.T. had undergone guerilla training in Lebanon.*

*When Prabhakaran later began to give the I.P.K.F. a tough time, some Indian military officials came up with another version. According to this account, Prabhakaran is said to move constantly from place to place, adopting a guerilla tactic perfected by Yasser Arafat. The Palestinian guerilla hero of yesteryear has become a political star with a high acceptability rating among voluble sections of the non-aligned camp. Will Prabhakaran do an Arafat? A difficult question with no instant answer.*

*If Prabhakaran is essentially a self-made guerilla leader, who are the people he surrounded himself with? He recruited and trained fiercely keen people, including girls. They were then motivated to fight grimly and murder their opponents mercilessly, almost on an inhuman scale. They were even brainwashed to commit suicide rather than pass on secrets to the 'enemy'.*

*It was on the strength of such guerilla-recruits that Prabhakaran, at one stage, claimed that the Sri Lankan Tamils were fast becoming a "nation of Tigers".*

*On the political side, his chief adviser has been Balasingam, while political-guerilla comrades like Yogi, Thilagar and others completed the coterie around him.*

*Balasingam is essentially an intelligent political theorist, though many have suspected that he is the evil brain behind Prabhakaran. In fact, it was this suspicion that led the Indian authorities to deport him shortly after the Thimpu conference in 1985. The immediate reason was an abrasive statement he had made on behalf of the E.N.L.F.*

He said the Eelam Tamil guerillas, and not the Indian Government, would decide when to order a ceasefire in the war between them and the Sri Lankan forces. At the time, India was desperately trying to organise a ceasefire so that the Thimpu talks could succeed.

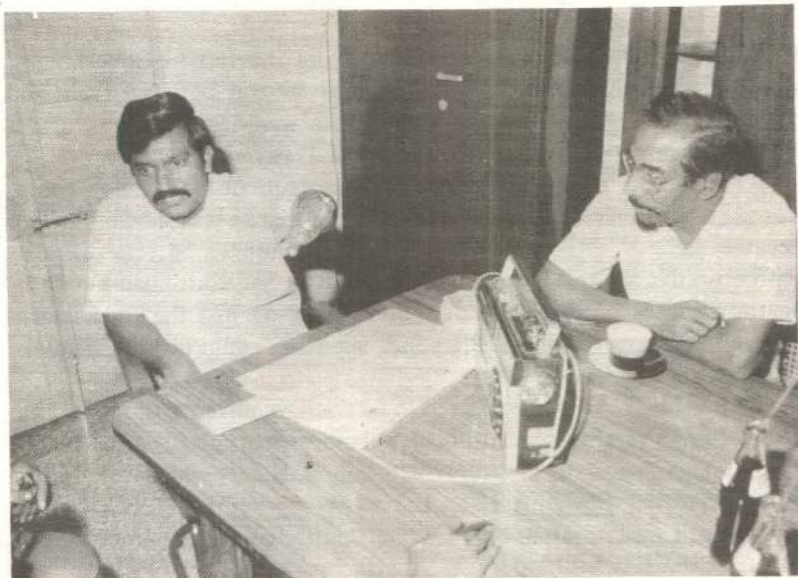
On the other hand, Chandrahasan, a non-militant Sri Lankan Tamil, was simultaneously deported. It was believed that he was shown the door because he had influenced T.E.L.O. to nominate Satyendra as its representative at the Thimpu conference. And Satyendra had put India on the mat. At Thimpu, he flew into a rage against the then Indian Foreign Secretary, Romesh Bhandari, accusing Delhi of not caring for Sri Lankan Tamil interests.

Now, T.E.L.O. was expected to be friendly towards India, in view of the Indian intelligence authorities' benign attitude towards it. The mutual friendship of the time between T.E.L.O. and the Indian intelligence men flowed from an Indian perception that T.E.L.O. was a leading Tamil group. The Indian sleuths could also more easily penetrate the T.E.L.O. ranks than the Tigers' psychological citadel. The Tigers, on the other hand, would always cock an eye at the Indian authorities, even while on Indian soil.

It was against this background that Chandrahasan was put on a plane to New York from Madras. But he staged a 'satyagraha', on board the aircraft. Much ado was made of this deportation by the Tamil Nadu politicians and Delhi revoked the order of deportation which was served on Chandrahasan. But Balasingam had no such luck. Very much later, he was allowed to return to India from London, the destination to which he had been deported. He was asked to keep a low profile for some time, which he did.

Not long thereafter, as Balasingam regained prominence, there was a bomb explosion on the terrace of the apartment in which he was staying in Madras. He escaped unhurt, and his critics among the rival Tamil groups set the story afloat that he himself had planted the bomb. For his part though, Balasingam laid the blame at the doorstep of Mossad, the Israeli counter-intelligence organisation which was giving advice to the Colombo government on how to tame the Tigers. Alternatively, Balasingam said, the bomb could have been planted by a Sri Lankan spy on the prowl in Madras.

Balasingam's real claim to fame in the Tigers' charmed circle was based on his steadfast ability to explain the various actions of Prabhakaran and his minions. For instance, Balasingam described the move to take over Jaffna in January 1987 as neither a unilateral declaration of independence nor the creation of a State within the Sri Lankan State.



*Velupillai Prabhakaran (left), Supreme Commander of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, with his political adviser, Anton Stanislaus Balasingam. The photo was taken at the Tigers' office in Madras (India) well before the Indo-Sri Lankan accord of July 1987.*

*Prabhakaran (right foreground) with Sathasivam Krishnakumar alias Kittu (left foreground), former regional commander of the Tigers in Jaffna.*



The move to set up a 'Tamil Eelam secretariat' was aimed at filling the "political vacuum" in the Northern Province, Balasingam said. According to him, the vacuum had arisen on account of the gradual collapse of Colombo's authority — in direct proportion to the success of the Tigers in "liberating" the province.

To arrest the danger of "social disintegration", the Tigers decided to give the people of the Northern Province a new administrative set-up of their own, he claimed. The collapse of Colombo's authority over Jaffna had created the danger of social disintegration of the Tamils, he further stated.

Balasingam was always associated with Prabhakaran's diplomatic dealings, whether in Delhi on the eve of the July accord or at the backstage parleys at the 1986 S.A.A.R.C. summit. How Prabhakaran first made his acquaintance with Balasingam, who was residing in London, is still a mystery even in the closed-circuit world of the Tigers.

Of the other Tiger personalities, Thilagar had been the quiet, soft-spoken spokesman. He was relatively a late-comer to the Tiger movement. He was also among those who had received training at a camp in India, in Tamil Nadu to be more precise. He has himself said this in a private conversation.

Thilagar represented the Tigers at Thimpu, but he hardly participated with any gusto. His attitude was in tune with the Tigers' reluctance to talk peace at that stage. Yet, much later, Jayakkody, the former Sri Lankan Special Deputy High Commissioner in Madras, tried to contact Thilagar. It appears Jayakkody had received his President's nod to try and establish contact with the Tigers in Madras. The idea was to break the ice in the strained relations between the Tigers and the Sri Lankan Government. Jayakkody had seen Thilagar at Thimpu, and, so, he tried to contact him. But Thilagar did not respond.

Sathasivam Krishnakumar, alias Kittu, for long the Jaffna 'regional commander' of the Tigers, has been active only on the fringes of their politics ever since he lost a leg in an ambush on the midnight of March 30, 1987. He enjoyed his heyday when the Tigers consolidated their position in Jaffna city during their war with the Sri Lankan forces in mid-1986.

Towards Christmas that year, he negotiated an exchange of prisoners with the late Vijaya Kumaranatunga. The swap deal enabled the release of a few Sri Lankan soldiers for some Tiger cadres. Kumaranatunga had an informal mandate from Jayewardene himself to negotiate such a deal. Kittu, for his part, had obtained Prabhakaran's prior approval.

By now, Kittu had shot into the limelight as the most powerful regional leader among the Tigers, receiving much international media attention on account of his guerilla exploits. It was while sitting pretty on the Christmas tree, as it were, that Kittu merrily announced his intention to take over Jaffna from Colombo's constitutional control — an event discussed elsewhere.

The Tiger leaders in Madras were, at the time, not amused at his enthusiasm in showing foreign journalists the Tigers' ordnance and aircraft-making units in the Jaffna region. Their aircraft project never really took off, but the ordnance factories did some roaring business. The Tiger leaders in Madras were not happy, because they felt that a few among the foreign journalists might pass on some vital information to the Sri Lankan Government, either unwittingly or indeed willingly. In fact, the Sri Lankan forces later targeted some of these ordnance factories, as a result of such information, it was said.

Be that as it may, Kittu came over to Madras for medical attention shortly after he lost his leg. So, he was very much in India when Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene signed the July deed. He later found himself under house-arrest in Madras when the Indo-Tiger war broke out.

Yogi is a hard-liner among the top Tiger leaders. He has always believed that the Tigers have a historic role to play in the affairs of the Sri Lankan Tamils. He is also quite adroit at dodging those pursuing him. Somehow, he gave the slip to the Tamil Nadu police when they zeroed in on the Tigers in 'Operation Disarm' shortly before the 1986 S.A.A.R.C. summit. He even managed to telephone a few journalists and alert them about the development.

The Indian intelligence sleuths have labelled Yogi a diehard, anti-Indian hawk among the Tigers. When he stayed in India, he used to analyse Delhi's moves for the worst possible motives, they say. He also believed in realpolitik considerations.

In a casual observation during the course of an informal chat with me, Yogi had dropped a realpolitik bombshell. This was some time after the Tigers had spurned the D.M.K. leader, Karunanidhi's offer of a purse for the Sri Lankan Tamil cause. Yogi noted that the Tigers could not but reject the purse, because the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.G.R., would take it amiss if the Tigers were to accept money from his arch political rival. But, Yogi added, the Tigers would obviously befriend Karunanidhi, should he ever come to power in Tamil Nadu.

These remarks assumed much significance when the Tigers later sought Karunanidhi's support after the outbreak of the Indo-Tiger war. No doubt, Karunanidhi's political backing was sought even though he

had not become the Chief Minister by then. Nonetheless, the Tigers approached him, suspecting that M.G.R. was now leaving them in the lurch.

Displaying such political acumen, Yogi left Madras for Jaffna at the earliest opportunity, soon after the Sri Lankan city came under the Tigers' control in January 1987. There, he blossomed into a fine orator in the Tamil cause. He was later fielded to make the symbolic surrender of a pistol, when the Tigers participated in the inaugural media show of the arms hand-over following the July accord.

It is such men as Prabhakaran, Balasingam, Yogi and Thilagar, who interacted with the press in Madras when the Tigers made it their home in exile. With a strict organisational discipline, they never really trod on the toes of the ordinary citizens of Tamil Nadu. The same could not be said of the other Sri Lankan Tamil groups when they stayed in India before the July accord.

Of course, the people of Tamil Nadu have never really bothered to distinguish one Sri Lankan Tamil group from another. They have a long list of grievances directed against all the Sri Lankan Tamils.

In August 1984, a powerful explosion at the Madras international airport caused considerable damage, besides claiming thirty lives. By the inept execution of a plot, a bomb went off at the Madras airport. The case of the prosecution is that the bomb was supposed to have been carried by an Air Lanka flight to Colombo where it was timed to go off.

No Sri Lankan Tamil militant group actually claimed responsibility for the airport blast. But the members of several non-Tiger groups were often caught trying to loot Indian banks and rob the better-off Sri Lankans living in Tamil Nadu — of their money and jewellery. The Tigers were never indicted in all this, though one or the other Sri Lankan Tamil militant group had always been mentioned as suspects.

On Deepavali day 1986, a shocking incident in Madras shook to their core the people of Tamil Nadu. The self-styled 'chief of staff' of the E.P.R.L.F., Douglas Devanandan, commanded a 'street operation' in which an Indian civilian was brutally killed. But for the timely intervention of the city police commissioner, the machine-gun-toting E.P.R.L.F. cadres might have taken a heavier toll of innocent Indian lives. The incident took place following a brawl between some of these militants and Indian civilians. According to eye-witness accounts, the E.P.R.L.F. cadres roughed up the Indians who had accidentally run into them on the street.

Yet, the E.P.R.L.F. leadership called for the constitution of an official, preferably judicial, probe panel to go into the "circumstances" leading to the fatal firing. But the Tamil Nadu Government declined

to institute an inquiry, on the grounds that it required no Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot to solve the so-called "riddle" of the "circumstances". The State authorities also did not want to elevate the crime to the status of a 'political offence' by ordering an official probe.

Despite this outrage, the E.P.R.L.F., professing Marxist ideology, somehow managed to keep its ties with Delhi intact. The organisation expelled the self-styled 'chief of staff' who directed the street operation in Madras. It is, of course, a different story that he later figured in the Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front, which came into being shortly before the July accord.

On a different plane, when the D.M.K. agitation over the Hindi issue in 1986-87 was marred by a spate of bomb explosions in Tamil Nadu, the State Government suspected the hand of another Sri Lankan Tamil group, namely T.E.L.O.

*On the whole, a long series of violence, robberies, dacoities and even drug smuggling by the Sri Lankan Tamil militants has left a scar on the minds and hearts of the people of Tamil Nadu. There is, therefore, no great empathy between the people of Tamil Nadu and the Sri Lankan Tamils. As a result, when Prabhakaran hoped that the Tamils in India would rise in revolt against the Indo-Tiger war, he simply drew a blank.*

*That the Tigers had not really committed any serious crimes on Indian soil, before the July accord, was a finer point which many people in Tamil Nadu are not even aware of. In fact, a top Indian diplomat once described the non-Tiger groups as "thugs" while conceding the Tigers' superior record of internal discipline and some commitment to their chosen cause. But, in the humble view of the ordinary citizens in Tamil Nadu, all the Sri Lankan Tamil separatists are Tigers, and only Tigers.*

*The people of Tamil Nadu also have no martial tradition as such, especially a guerilla one. Therefore, they have not fallen head over heels in love with the Sri Lankan Tamil militants. Consequently, a man like Appapillai Amirthalingam, the non-militant Eelam Tamil leader, still finds a hospitable home in Tamil Nadu.*

## 8

# A man for parleys

TODAY, Amirthalingam has the appearance of a Sri Lankan Tamil patriarch, though he actually grew up in the shadow of S.J.V. Chelvanayagam, one of the fathers of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism. This is not to gloss over the fact that Amirthalingam was, at one stage before the July accord, accused of being a quisling in the Tamil cause. Yet, it must be said, there is no hard evidence to confirm such a dubious distinction.

At the same time, by March 1988, some Indian policy-makers were disenchanted with him. It was felt he had developed cold feet, afraid to stir out of his Indian home-in-exile and plunge into the maelstrom of Sri Lankan Tamil politics.

Be that as it may, Amirthalingam is basically a parliamentarian by instinct and upbringing. He has the parliamentary elan of a Tamil Edmund Burke, so to speak. He looks at the Tamil problem from purely a political, and by no means militant-guerilla, angle.

He has also been intimately associated with India's long and arduous efforts to find a political solution to the Sri Lankan imbroglio. Of course, on a few rare occasions, he was not readily consulted. For instance, he was not called to the backstage parleys at the 1986 S.A.A.R.C. summit, whereas Prabhakaran was invited.

Perhaps he was sidelined for the simple reason that, only a few months earlier, he had journeyed to Colombo from Madras for a face-to-face political dialogue with Jayewardene. But, when Rajiv Gandhi decided to sign the July pact with Jayewardene, Amirthalingam was merely informed of the impending accord in the same manner as the Tamil militants were told.

All the same, Amirthalingam should have soon had a role to play, because the July accord specified that all "residual" matters should be

settled before the political devolution package for the Tamils was presented. However, as noted earlier, Jayewardene has not shown any great enthusiasm for the settlement of the "residual" matters. Actually, the President's political time-table for the Sri Lankan Tamils is as follows:

The two Tamil provinces of the north and east will be merged only after elections are held to the two separate provincial councils. And the political devolution package will be pieced together only after the unification of the north and east.

The proposed provincial council polls have been postponed in view of the continuing Tiger menace. So, Jayewardene has soft-pedalled the question of resolving the "residual issues". He does not want the Sinhalese hawks to suspect that he is rushing to please the Tamils or India. Therefore, Amirthalingam has not yet had the opportunity to figure prominently in the follow-up measures on the July pact.

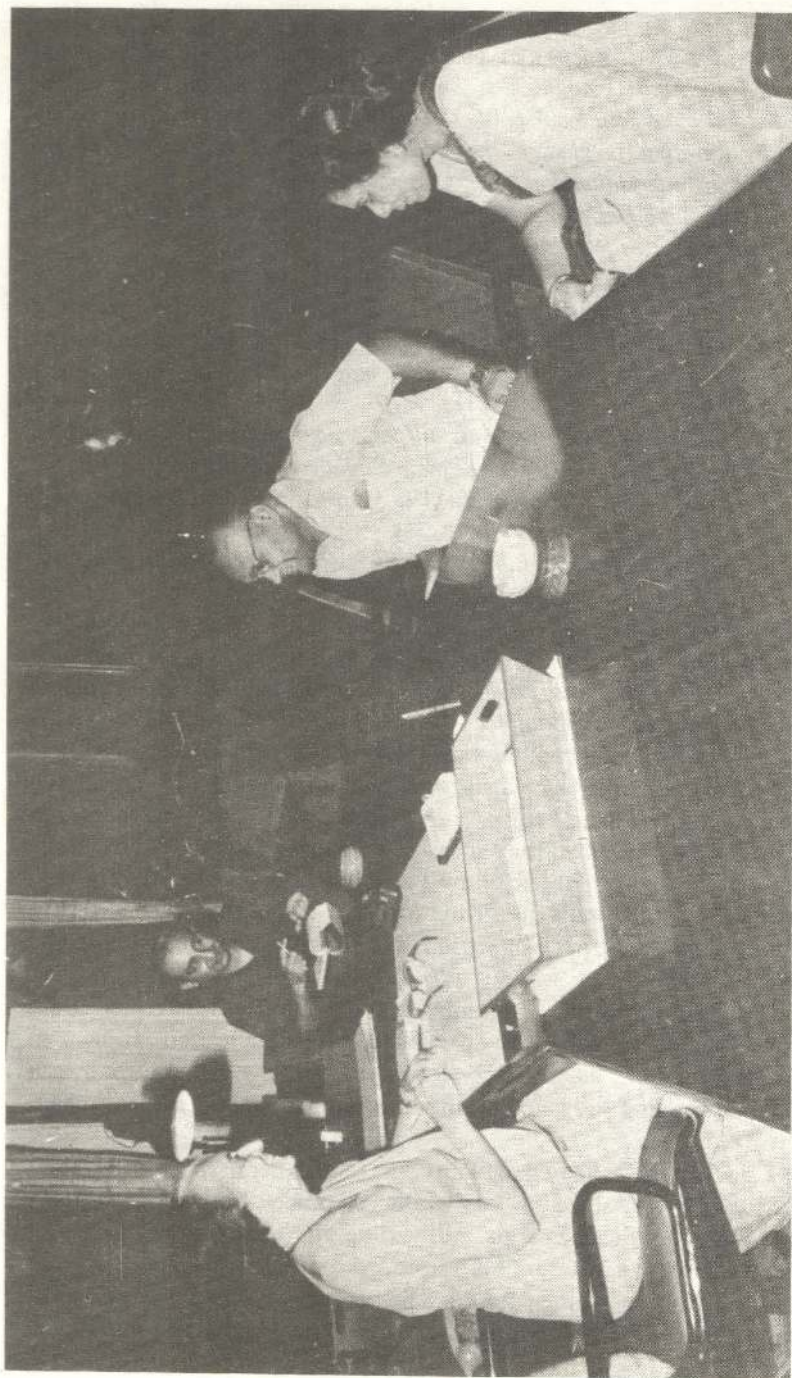
But, it was to Amirthalingam that the late Indira Gandhi turned when she first took control of the Sri Lankan Tamil problem in 1983. She forced Jayewardene to let India intrude in his country's affairs following the anti-Tamil riots of that year. And she fielded Amirthalingam for talks with Colombo on behalf of the Sri Lankan Tamils. For his part, he had known Indira Gandhi even earlier.

In 1977, the Tamil United Liberation Front had emerged as the largest opposition party in the Sri Lankan general elections. And Amirthalingam became the leader of the opposition in parliament.

The T.U.L.F. had won on the political plank of a separate and sovereign nation-state of 'Tamil Eelam'. When the then Indian Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, paid a State visit to Sri Lanka shortly thereafter, Amirthalingam briefed him on the political plight of the island's Tamils. He explained the fall-out of the 1973 official orders which discriminated against Tamils seeking entry to the universities — an issue that had upset the Sri Lankan Tamil youths. Morarji Desai, it seems, gave the T.U.L.F. leader a patient hearing, though the two men did not converse on the same political wavelength.

When Morarji Desai was still the Prime Minister, Amirthalingam met Indira Gandhi too. It seems she cautioned him that Jayewardene "is an old fox in politics". Such an early acquaintance with her had a beneficial political spin-off for the T.U.L.F. leader.

*In 1983, Indira Gandhi decided that India would play the role of an overbearing big brother in Sri Lanka, though not the omnipotent big brother of George Orwell's 1984. And she backed Amirthalingam in the political talks that ensued.*



*The former Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi (left) greeting Appapillai Amirthalingam and his wife in New Delhi. The photo was taken some time before the outbreak of ethnic violence in Sri Lanka in 1983. Amirthalingam is still the leader of the moderate Tamil United Liberation Front.*

*The wily Jayewardene was, no doubt, expected to tackle Amirthalingam easily. But Indira Gandhi was by no means an innocent Alice in the wonderland of international politics. In 1971, when she took the world by storm by liberating Bangladesh, she had indeed outwitted 'Nixinger'. As every schoolboy in international politics knows, 'Nixinger' was a term used to describe the combined efforts of the then U.S. President, Richard Nixon, and his foreign policy adviser, Dr. Henry Kissinger.*

*With such a brilliant record, Indira Gandhi soon began to take serious note of the Sri Lankan Tamil militants, who were yet to strike it rich in a big way despite Prabhakaran's eventful ambush of the Sri Lankan soldiers in mid-1983. On her part, it was a subtle move to checkmate Jayewardene behind the scenes.*

*On the actual stage itself, an all-party conference was convened by Jayewardene in January 1984. The main Sinhalese opposition party, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party of the former Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, boycotted the meeting.*

*In the circumstances, Indira Gandhi's special diplomatic emissary, G. Parthasarathy, valiantly tried to keep the political process alive. He even met Sirimavo Bandaranaike on a few occasions. From Jayewardene's angle, she was acting like the proverbial bull in his china shop of delicate diplomatic proposals. Amirthalingam, on the other hand, was slowly but surely finding his feet as the prime negotiator on behalf of the island's Tamils.*

Sri Lankan Tamil contemporary history is strewn with broken pacts — the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact of July 26, 1957 and the Senanayake-Chelvanayagam pact of March 1965. Both agreements, in different ways, provided for a measure of political power to the Tamils and a certain degree of usage of the Tamil language for official purposes. Both pacts, signed with the Prime Minister of the day, turned out to be mere scraps of paper, for reasons not sought to be discussed in the present study.

Primarily, however, the failure of the pacts could be traced to an absence of political will on the part of the Sinhalese leaders. In fact, in 1957, Jayewardene, an opposition leader then, set out on a protest march to Kandy, raising his voice against the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact.

Later, in 1961, the Federal Party, the forerunner of the Tamil United Liberation Front, staged a 'satyagraha' or peaceful protest in support of the Tamil political demands. At the time, the Tamil leaders were prepared to settle for a degree of federalism, with the idea of a separate Tamil nation-state not yet being pressed. The protest was absolutely peaceful, winning the praise and admiration of Chakravarthy Rajagopalachari,

an incisive Indian political thinker and a former Governor-General. He noted that the Sri Lankan Tamil 'satyagraha' was perhaps more peaceful than even some of the Indian protests launched against the British rule with the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi himself.

So, when Amirthalingam sat at the all-party conference in 1984, he had to bear in mind the fate of the previous pacts in Sri Lanka's recent history. Old habits die hard, and the Sinhalese politicians were in no mood to grant autonomy to the Tamils on a platter. Amirthalingam, too, had to be wary, because the Tamil problem had, for the first time, assumed urgency from the Sinhalese angle as well, following Prabhakaran's spectacular piece of insurgency which left 13 Sri Lankan soldiers dead.

The other, and no less important, factor that impelled Jayewardene to talk to the Tamils was the fact that Indira Gandhi was by now putting pressure on him.

To put the issue in perspective, the Tamil militancy had not yet gained full strength; in fact, it did not become a major force until May 1986, when the Tigers, soon after liquidating T.E.L.O. took on the Sri Lankan Army successfully. Yet, the 1984 all-party conference had a logic of its own, the logic of Jayewardene's need to talk peace and save face after the Sinhalese anti-Tamil riots of 1983.

The conference itself was wound up nearly one year later after the usual rigmarole of speeches, committee sessions etc. From then on, Amirthalingam regularly figured as the man sought after by the Indian authorities whenever a political proposal had to be discussed with Colombo. He was Delhi's man for parleys with Colombo.

Some time after the all-party conference, G. Parathasarathy came up with certain proposals for regional autonomy, but these too fell by the wayside. A stalemate now settled on the Sinhalese-Tamil attitudes, with the extremists gaining the upper hand on both sides. A classical vicious cycle had also come into play. The extremists gained in strength as the political talks faltered, and the talks were failing because the extremists were beginning to dictate terms.

After the 1984 conference, the major event on the diplomatic calendar was the Thimpu meeting held in two separate rounds — one in July 1985 and the other the following August. On this occasion, Amirthalingam insisted that no purpose would be served without the participation of the Tamil militants. India too was keen on ensuring that the militants should be rid of the label of 'terrorists', and so persuaded them to attend the Thimpu talks.

The ice age in the frosty Sinhalese-Tamil relations was thus ended, but the progress was glacially slow at this Himalayan capital of Bhutan. In the rarefied atmosphere of Thimpu, the Tamil militants found, for a while, a kindred soul in the T.U.L.F. Yet the talks meandered on without progress, even in the second round.

*At this, the then Indian Foreign Secretary, Romesh Bhandari, called the Tamil participants for a pep-talk outside the conference. Warming up at that fireside pep-talk on a mild evening in the exotic Himalayan resort, Bhandari was soon in an expansive mood. While urging the Tamils to be more accommodative towards the Sinhalese, he used, it seems, some abrasive language — like “Bloody hell, can’t you agree (to be more flexible)?” The words were obviously used in a matter-of-fact, friendly spirit.*

*Yet, the T.E.L.O. representative, Satyendra, took exception to the use of such “unparliamentary language”. He argued that the words indicated India’s utter unconcern for the Sri Lankan Tamils. Without joining issue, Bhandari explained that he had not meant any insult.*

*There was then a lull for some time, before Satyendra is believed to have raked up India’s alleged unconcern all over again, abusing both Bhandari and India. At this stage, Amirthalingam intervened, asking Satyendra to stop the harangue. Finally, at the instance of the T.U.L.F. leader, a vote of apologies to Bhandari was also passed. It is, of course, a quirk of diplomacy that Romesh Bhandari later found himself unimportant in Sri Lankan affairs, even as he retired from service.*

For Amirthalingam, it was a step forward from Thimpu in 1985 to Colombo in 1986. Taking the Thimpu fiasco gamely in its stride, India went ahead with the search for a political solution. The result: a new round of talks in Colombo, which Amirthalingam attended at India’s instance. In the meantime, India had begun to support the cause of the Tamil militants so as to tighten the diplomatic screws on the Colombo government.

Before setting out for these talks, Amirthalingam said the Sri Lankan proposals were not really a “satisfactory basis for substantive talks”. Yet, “we owe it to our people to give the proposals a try”. He himself offered an alternative to the vexed question of merging the island’s Northern and Eastern Provinces. The Tamils living in contiguous areas could together form one single political unit, he said. But the proposal was not actively pursued, even as Colombo dragged its feet over the entire issue.

After his mid-1986 peace journey to Colombo, Amirthalingam was gradually sidelined on the fringes, especially at the time of the S.A.A.R.C. summit later that year. Of course, he was by no means kept in the dark

about the proposals made there by Jayewardene. But, at the time, India was trying to play the Tiger card, as it were. In fact, Prabhakaran, who was called to the backstage parleys at the S.A.A.R.C. summit, was visibly elated at his new status.

He was so buoyant that he even spoke of keeping the door open for tactical talks with Colombo, under the Indian auspices, while pursuing his militant operations against the Sri Lankan Government. He reasoned that Colombo would give greater concessions to the Tamils in direct proportion to his success in "liberating" Tamil areas.

It was at this stage that M.K. Eelaventhan, a non-militant Eelam activist, appealed to Delhi to recognise the Tigers and the other militant groups, giving them the same diplomatic recognition it had accorded the P.L.O. and S.W.A.P.O., the South West African People's Organisation in Namibia. Both S.W.A.P.O. and the P.L.O. are well-known freedom-seeking militant groups. Eelaventhan had left the T.U.L.F. to carry out propaganda for the creation of an Eelam State.

As for Amirthalingam, he remained in the shadows for some more time. Later, in December 1986, Rajiv Gandhi sent two Ministers of State, K. Natwar Singh and P. Chidambaram, to Colombo to reassess the prospects for a political solution. On their way to Colombo from Delhi, they broke journey in Madras and held extensive consultations with all the Tamil groups, including Amirthalingam and his T.U.L.F. colleagues. The talks, which began in the morning, went on till well past midnight on a fullmoon day. Yet, in the end, darkness descended at fullmoon time, with the talks failing.

Later, at Colombo, the two Ministers and the Sri Lankan authorities came up with the so-called December 19 proposals. It was agreed the Sinhalese portion of the Amparai constituency would be delinked from the Eastern Province to create a new and separate province for the Tamils and the Tamil-speaking Muslims. But these proposals were not acceptable to the Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups.

Amirthalingam also joined the chorus of disapproval against these proposals. Interestingly, as we have noted briefly, he had earlier toyed with the idea of a truncated Tamil-speaking Eastern Province. Such a province could be carved out of contiguous Tamil areas in the existing Eastern Province and merged with the north, he had felt at the time of his Colombo talks in mid-1986. But Amirthalingam apparently jettisoned this proposal of his, in view of the growing opposition to it from the other Tamil groups, not to speak of Colombo's refusal to pick up even this.

It should also be noted that Amirthalingam's role in Sri Lankan Tamil affairs has sometimes transcended his participation in the political dialogues. At one stage, as the Tamil militants gradually gained in importance, the T.U.L.F. even nominated the late Kuttimani to fill a vacancy caused by the death of a sitting member who represented the T.U.L.F. in parliament. This was long before Prabhakaran burst on the Tamil scene. The idea was to secure the release of Kuttimani, who was then languishing in the Welikade prison for some alleged offences against the State. Amirthalingam was behind the move to make Kuttimani a parliamentarian, a move which did not fructify because of Colombo's opposition.

Amirthalingam had also helped some militants seek funds abroad, as we have already seen. He is of the view that there is no fundamental difference in the basic objectives of the moderate T.U.L.F. and the militant groups, though their approaches differ widely. He points out how the Federal Party, the T.U.L.F.'s predecessor, had drawn up the same four cardinal principles which the Tamil militants later presented at Thimpu as their proposals for a Magna Carta of Tamil rights. The key proposals were the recognition of the Sri Lankan Tamils as a distinct nationality and an acceptance of their right to self-determination.

On the whole, Amirthalingam has worked on the actual details of political devolution to the Tamils, besides playing the fringe-role of helping the militants. He may still have a role to play, should Jayewardene decide to resolve the "residual" issues of Tamil political autonomy. But, for the moment, the militants, especially the Tamil Tigers, still hold the field.

## 9

# Peace for a price

NEARLY nine months after the signing of the July accord, the three main actors on the scene — Rajiv Gandhi, Jayewardene and Prabhakaran — had no clue on how to come out of the mess clean. While Rajiv Gandhi was visibly vexed with Prabhakaran's attitude and antics, Jayewardene was no less worried about the interminable stay of the I.P.K.F. in the island, as he saw it. Prabhakaran, on the other hand, was apparently running out of options, with the I.P.K.F. launching a new two-pronged offensive in the first week of April 1988.

The first offensive, 'Operation Pawan', launched in October 1987, was aimed at freeing Jaffna city from the Tigers' control. This was followed by a battle of attrition with Prabhakaran. But he coped with this battle pretty well, despite a couple of tactical appeals for ceasefire, made in January 1988 and the following March.

Prabhakaran's tactical S.O.S. to Rajiv Gandhi, dated March 9, 1988, was more or less on the same lines as his previous appeal of January 13, 1988. Nonetheless, his appeal in March was noteworthy for such claims and assertions as follow:

"Morally and spiritually, we are opposed to this war (with the I.P.K.F.). We always wished to put an end to this painful tragedy, which was not (of) our choice. In this context, we regret to note that the Government of India has persistently rejected our urgent and sincere pleas for peace.

"Insofar as the Indo-Sri Lankan accord is concerned, the (Tigers) have pledged to cooperate (in) its implementation. We still insist that the implementation of the accord should safeguard the interests and aspirations of our people. Our concern for the interest of our people is based on our legitimate fears (about) the chauvinistic attitude of the Sri Lankan regime."

Refusing to take the Tiger leader at his word, the I.P.K.F. began a new, full-scale offensive in the dense forests of the Northern Province, just south of Elephant Pass. A narrow strip of land, Elephant Pass links the northernmost Jaffna peninsula with the rest of the island.

This new operation, launched in the first week of April 1988, was code-named 'Viraat' on the eastern side of the main highway just south of Elephant Pass, while the parallel offensive on the western side of the same road was code-signalled 'Trishul'. Unlike in the case of 'Operation Pawan', the field commanders in charge of the 'Viraat-Trishul Operation' were allowed to use helicopter gunships, thus introducing the element of aerial warfare. Apparently, the idea was to track down Prabhakaran as early as possible, by forcing him to come out of his jungle hideouts in this region.

Rather curiously, Dixit, at this delicate stage, made a controversial 'leak' about a money deal between India and Prabhakaran. The secret deal had been struck on the eve of the July accord.

Letting the cat out of his diplomatic bag in early April 1988, Dixit broke the belated news of July 1987. Talking to a few Western journalists in Colombo, he said that a monetary transaction had been finalised on the eve of the July pact. This raised a furore in both India and Sri Lanka.

The Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, K. Natwar Singh, confirmed Dixit's story a few days later. He told the lower house of the Indian parliament that Delhi had indeed agreed to "extend some financial relief" to the Tiger cadres. The idea was to fund the "rehabilitation" of these cadres following the July accord, which was then on the Indian diplomatic agenda.

Natwar Singh maintained that Delhi had made it clear to Prabhakaran that the aid package would be made available "only till the rehabilitation" of his followers. Indeed, the suggestion in this regard had earlier come from the Tiger leader himself, when he was told that the Tigers would not be allowed to collect 'taxes' in the Sri Lankan Tamil region from the day of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord.

Prabhakaran, according to Natwar Singh, explained to Rajiv Gandhi that the 'taxes' which the Tigers were then collecting were being used to give "allowances" to these militants for their "upkeep". Therefore, Prabhakaran pleaded, suitable "compensation" should be paid to make good the 'taxes' which he could no longer hope to levy on the Sri Lankan Tamils.

Acceding to this request, India agreed to extend some financial assistance to the Tigers. The only political objective was to help these militants make the all-important "transition from militancy to peaceful

democratic politics". The Indian Minister added that Prabhakaran had contended that he would find it "exceedingly difficult to retain (the Tigers) loyalty" should India turn a deaf ear to his "request".

Natwar Singh asserted vehemently that there was nothing amiss in making such an offer of money when Prabhakaran had, at that stage, accepted the imminent Indo-Sri Lankan accord, besides agreeing to lay down arms. Therefore, any suggestion that India had, after all, tried to buy Prabhakaran's support for the accord "is an aspersion beneath contempt".

All this is fine on paper. But shorn of the niceties of these explanations, the Indian defence of this monetary deal with Prabhakaran has thrown up a question-mark over Delhi's diplomatic finesse.

For their part, the Tigers readily admitted that a money transaction was indeed finalised during the Rajiv Gandhi-Prabhakaran talks in Delhi on the eve of the July agreement of 1987. The Tigers' version is as follows:

"During these talks, the Indian Prime Minister pledged to set up an interim government (in the Sri Lankan Tamil region) with the (Tigers) playing a dominant role. And (Rajiv Gandhi) offered funds for the rehabilitation and resettlement of Tamil refugees. The (Tigers) were also offered five million rupees (on a) monthly (basis) until the formation of an interim government, as compensation, following (the) discussions to withdraw the taxation system which (till then) provided the main source of income to the (Tigers).

"We wish to confirm that the Government of India made a payment of Rs. 5 million and thereafter withdrew its commitments, following the collapse of the proposed interim government. Therefore, the funds offered (by India) have nothing to do with the (Indo-Sri Lankan) accord, but (only) related to the formation of an interim government and (the) maintenance of (the Tiger) cadres. We also wish to point out that the interim government was not an item envisaged in the (Indo-Sri Lankan) accord.

"During his talks in Delhi, our leader, Prabhakaran, (indeed) refused to accept the (Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene) accord, expressing serious reservations on various issues, particularly the provincial council proposals which (still) fall short of the (Sri Lankan) Tamil aspirations. Prabhakaran is (even now) firmly convinced that the proposals envisaged in the (Indo-Sri Lankan) accord would not pave the way for a permanent settlement of the Tamil question."

*This elaborate version put out by the Tigers on April 6, 1988 tallied with Natwar Singh's statement, also made on the same day, in only one crucial*

area of contention. Both the Indian Government and the Tigers clearly admitted that a money deal had been struck on the eve of the July accord. There was also no dispute that Delhi had paid out one instalment of the promised money.

This brings us to a discussion on the Indo-Tiger equation as reflected in the Dixit-Natwar Singh disclosures of April 1988. The Tamil Tigers disingenuously invented the argument that the Indian payment had nothing to do with the question of their accepting the July accord. The payment was received in the context of the proposal for an interim government, which was outside the purview of the main agreement between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene. The Indo-Tiger money transaction could not, therefore, be viewed in the context of the July accord at all!

On the other vital question, whether Prabhakaran had accepted the idea of an Indo-Sri Lankan agreement, the Tigers contradicted Natwar Singh's assertion that their leader agreed to fall in line with the Indian position while finalising the money deal.

Of course, the Tigers had often prevaricated on this question of whether they accepted the July accord or not. But, as we have seen right at the beginning, Prabhakaran first gave the impression of endorsing the Rajiv-Gandhi-Jayewardene pact, only to confound India subsequently by trying to gamble on a strategy of easing the I.P.K.F. out of Sri Lanka itself.

This leaves the question of why the Tiger supremo entered into a secret money deal with India at the time the July pact was signed. At that time, he was clearly swept off his feet by the breezy manner in which Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene hustled towards a mutual political embrace. So, the only way Prabhakaran could hope to regain his political poise was to let the unfolding events take their course, for some time at least. It was in this context perhaps that Prabhakaran asked India for monetary compensation. Little did he really expect that India would so readily agree to pay him.

But when the payment did come his way, he received it gleefully for what it was worth. It was, no doubt, a secret deal, but it appears that his hard-line lieutenants came to know of it. These hard-liners, as we noted elsewhere, were always wary of India's real intentions over the Sri Lankan Tamil question.

By accepting the Indian payment, for whatever reason, Prabhakaran angered the hard-liners in his camp. He therefore could not but harden his attitude towards India at this time in order to humour the hard-liners and save his own political skin. Indeed, according to a leading Indian politician, who has had intimate contacts with the Tigers, Prabhakaran's post-accord anti-Indian activities can be traced to the pressure from the hard-liners in his entourage at this time.

The dictates of the hard-liners do not, of course, tell the whole story. The peculiarities of Prabhakaran's own political personality also came into full play when he obtained payment from India. In the first place, he was not amused at the hurried manner in which Rajiv Gandhi wanted to settle the Sri Lankan Tamil problem without giving the Tigers a monopoly over political power in the proposed new dispensation. It was, therefore, not beyond his penchant for political mischief that he should have tried to hoodwink Rajiv Gandhi by appearing to accept the imminent Indo-Sri Lankan accord. And, there was no better way to do so, from Prabhakaran's angle, than by seeking payments as compensation for the 'taxes' that were now in jeopardy. After all, it requires no great political clairvoyance to realise that a trade-off for the 'taxes' was but a price for 'accepting' the July accord and peace.

All this is not to suggest that Prabhakaran was acting, from the very beginning, like a thoroughly programmed political computer with a purpose. He, doubtless, went ahead with certain actions hoping that something would turn up positively. As noted already, his very gamble of a war with the I.P.K.F. was based on the hope that the people of Tamil Nadu would rise in revolt against the I.P.K.F. reprisal-offensive.

*Yet, the Tiger Leader's act of receiving money from India was not a straight quid pro quo for an apparent acceptance of the July accord. After all, he had earlier received payments from the then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.G. Ramachandran, not to speak of assistance from Delhi itself. Noting that the Tigers had "got limited help" in the sphere of "military training" long before the July accord, their 'Political Committee' once said that the Tigers would never, in turn, become "the slave army of India".*

*It is, therefore, easy to see that Prabhakaran was primarily playing a game with India while accepting money from Delhi in the context of the July pact. Why then did India agree to make the payment? The secret deal was, in a sense, a price for obtaining Prabhakaran's consent for the Indo-Sri Lankan accord, despite the fine gloss that Natwar Singh put over the entire episode. Even if the money was meant only to rehabilitate the Tiger cadres, Prabhakaran had sought it on the grounds that he could not retain their loyalty in the absence of any such compensation. This really shows that Delhi was keen to please Prabhakaran. What for? So that he would fall in line with India's intentions in Sri Lanka. This was, at best, a subtle price for Prabhakaran's acceptance of peace in the Sri Lankan Tamil region, which was at the back of India's diplomatic mind in July 1987.*

*This raises the question why Dixit chose to disclose the secret deal in April 1988. India was by now thoroughly disgusted with Prabhakaran's antics and attitude. So, a revelation of this nature would show up Prabhakaran as a*

*political quack who would give up all his pretensions as a freedom-fighter for the jingle of money. The idea was also to present Prabhakaran in a poor light before his own people.*

*But, in all this, Delhi itself came in for some adverse attention, both in India and Sri Lanka. A few political commentators rated the Indian action as a parody of a medieval Machiavellian plot. Some others saw it as a crude imitation of the works of Chanakya, that ancient Indian wizard of statecraft.*

*Whichever way one looks at it, the story of India's payment to Prabhakaran, in the specific context of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord of July 1987, shows that India still has a long way to go before graduating as a regional superpower possessing poise and political finesse. What, then, is India up to in Sri Lanka?*

## An agenda for tomorrow

INDIA'S political agenda is in three parts: first, as a protector of the Sri Lankan Tamils; second, as a power that alone is capable of bringing peace to Sri Lanka; and, third but no less important, as a regional superpower with geo-political interests.

How far has India fulfilled its role as the protector of the Sri Lankan Tamils? Paradoxically, as we have seen, India has got bogged down in a war with the Tamil Tigers. Jaffna was free from the Tigers' control by the end of October 1987. But, thereafter, the continuing Indo-Tiger war has become a battle of attrition in both military and political terms.

Militarily, India is infinitely superior to the Tigers, but the latter have the advantage of waging a guerilla war on their home terrain. So, despite India's best efforts, it has not so far succeeded in distancing the Sri Lankan Tamils from the Tigers.

Such isolation is a *sine qua non* of political policy, if India is to cow down the Tigers as a "reckless band of anti-Indian adventurers". After all, any insurgent group draws sustenance from the people among whom it moves.

By early March 1988, nearly five months after India's 'Operation Pawan' began, the Tigers were able to force a civil disobedience movement on the people in such far-flung places as Jaffna and Batticaloa. The civil disobedience agitation was directed not so much at the Sri Lankan Government, as was the custom in the past, but against the I.P.K.F. and its continued presence in the Tamil homeland.

No doubt, India has claimed, with some justification, that the people have obeyed the dictates of the Tigers more out of a chilling fear of reprisals than out of any cheerful readiness. Yet, the very fact that the ordinary people still fear reprisals from the Tigers only shows that they do not have enough confidence in the Indian peace force as their protector.

*Not that the ordinary Sri Lankan Tamils do not have faith in India's firepower, which, if allowed full play, can be quite awesome. Actually, they do not trust India. They may readily trust the Indian gun, but they do not believe the Indian soldier so easily. Basically, in the eyes of the Eelam Tamils, India is a stranger; no doubt, a friend in the past and perhaps a friend in the future; but, for the present, not to be trusted. This is because they are simply confused at the ferocity of the Indo-Tiger war. The war itself is dragging on partly because India cannot afford to annihilate the Tigers altogether, in view of the political and diplomatic risk involved in doing so.*

*At the same time, the Sri Lankan Tamils continue to regard the Tigers as their "own boys". The people are, of course, sick and tired of the gruesome guerilla ways of the Tigers. But they simply do not know of anyone else, other than the Tigers, who could protect them against the Sinhalese, in the event the I.P.K.F. leaves Sri Lanka suddenly, for whatever reason.*

In political terms also, India has not played the part of a protector with any visible success so far. Here, India is not to blame directly, because the Tigers have upset all the time-tables envisaged in the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene accord. All the same, can India revive the political process that has been disrupted by the Indo-Tiger war?

Delhi is certainly trying hard. But much would also depend on Jayewardene's political finesse. In fact, on March 1, 1988, he decided to postpone the proposed provincial council elections in the Tamil region as well as in the J.V.P.-infested Sinhalese-majority provinces. Why? The potential of both groups to disrupt the elections in their respective spheres of influence got the better of the President's wishes. This, in spite of the secret move for a deal between the Sri Lankan Government and the Tigers behind India's back.

What then is the significance of Dixit's alarmist statement of February 27, 1988? In the light of the secret parleys between a section of the Sri Lankan Government and a Tiger emissary, both Colombo and Prabhakaran may sing the same tune of asking the I.P.K.F. to quit, Dixit had said.

First, the Indian High Commissioner was quite annoyed by the move for a secret dialogue. Secondly, the logical corollary of any secret deal between the Sri Lankan adversaries can only mean that India will then have no further role to play in the island's affairs. Of course, real politics is never as simple as that. Even if the Sri Lankan foes strike a secret deal, India need not immediately run for cover. The strength of the I.P.K.F. and India's own geo-political interests cannot be trifled with so easily.

Yet, the third reason why Dixit made the statement was to drive home the point that India will readily meet any diplomatic challenge to

its perceived role on the island. In other words, it was a coded signal to the Sri Lankan adversaries that they could ignore India only at their own peril, so to say.

Fourthly, by making public the details of the proposed secret deal between the Tigers and a section of the Sri Lankan Government — such details as he could lay his diplomatic hands on — Dixit was clearly seeking to discredit the Tigers in the eyes of the Sri Lankan Tamils. The obvious diplomatic game was to try and drive a wedge between the Tigers and the Tamils. The objective was to smoothen the process of disarming the Tigers to that extent.

At the time Dixit made the disclosure, the Tiger cadres were operating primarily from the Eastern Province, though their leaders were still commanding them from bunkers in the jungles elsewhere. Therefore, Dixit was clearly hoping to present the Tigers in a poor light before the eyes of the people of the Eastern Province. This point will become clearer by the following outline of Dixit's disclosure.

Dixit said the Tigers were negotiating the idea of giving up all their claims to represent the people of the east. In return, on the word of the Sinhalese secret squad of negotiators, Colombo would give the Tigers exclusive political rights to re-enter the Northern Province freely. The Tigers, in may be recalled, had, following the I.P.K.F. operations, fanned out in large numbers from the north, their main bastion in the last few years.

The re-entry to the north would not be an illusory gain, for the Tigers would indeed be allowed to form an interim government of their own in the Northern Province. In fact, if the word of the Sinhalese freelance negotiators were to hold good, the Tigers could run the interim government for three to five years. During this period, they would not have to face elections at all.

This account of the secret diplomatic poker game between the Tigers and some members of the Sri Lankan Government has been reconstructed from Dixit's own disclosure for the purpose of greater clarity. It can be seen that the basic objective of these secret parleys was to sideline India.

To the negotiators, it was a case of "Sri Lanka, their Sri Lanka", where India should have no *locus standi*. By the deal, if it had been clinched, the Tigers would regain their political control over the Northern Province which they had lost the moment the I.P.K.F. landed in Sri Lanka.

For their part, the Sinhalese freelance negotiators, whose identity Dixit did not reveal, were hoping to make India irrelevant in Sri Lankan politics. They were also hoping to purge the Eastern Province of the

Tigers. Though not a strong force there at any time before the July accord, the Tigers were now beginning to take roots in the east. The I.P.K.F. action of turning the heat on the Tigers in the north had, in a sense, led to this development which the Sinhalese did not relish.

The inter-play of such complex political psychology on both sides had featured the secret talks behind India's back. Why then did the freelance 'diplomats' on either side fail to clinch a deal? Obviously because a secret political trade-off would have had very little chance of being translated into a reality. The powerful presence of India on the Sri Lankan scene was the deciding factor to reckon with. Yet, Jayewardene privately blessed the Sinhalese freelance negotiators, if only to use the secret talks as a political trial balloon to test the Indian response.

Interestingly, in this context, Dixit also made it clear that Jayewardene, aware as he was of the freelance 'diplomacy', had himself never talked to Prabhakaran. The President also reaffirmed his commitment to the July accord with the Indian Prime Minister, Dixit further noted.

*This brings us to the second task on India's political agenda, namely the need to establish that the I.P.K.F. alone is the best bet for peace in the island. The President cannot, in all fairness, ask the I.P.K.F. to leave till elections are held in the Tamil region and a reasonably responsible provincial government is formed there.*

*When he first announced in January 1988 his intention to hold elections in the Tamil region, Jayewardene did not make any overt or covert request for the Indian peace force to quit before the slated polls. This would only mean that Jayewardene was convinced that the Indian military presence would be needed for the conduct of the polls in the Tamil country. Here, the word 'country' is used in a geo-cultural sense of the term and not in the political connotation of a separate nation-state.*

*Significantly, on the very day his government's selective postponement of the polls was announced through the Election Commission, the President also told a public meeting that the I.P.K.F. would stay in the island till the restoration of peace. This reinforces the political reading that the President would not ask India to wash its hands of the Sri Lankan Tamil problem in a hurry. Logically, the I.P.K.F. may have to supervise the polls to install a representative Tamil provincial government, the first of its kind since the island got independence.*

A brief but relevant digression here. When the Tigers first gave the impression of accepting the Indo-Sri Lankan accord, they made a similar point, though from a different perspective. In private conversations, they said that, if they had read Delhi right, the I.P.K.F., then on its way

to Sri Lanka, would not be withdrawn till the formation of a stable Tamil provincial government.

At that stage, Prabhakaran was momentarily nursing hopes of riding to power in democratic elections, perhaps after 'rigging' them. A preponderant presence in the interim set-up — a half-way house to the elections — would help 'rig' the polls. These hopes were kindled on and off for quite a while, until Prabhakaran gradually realised that India would not let him play such a game.

During his long conversation with me in Jaffna on September 7, 1987, when he gave me a deep insight into the working of his political mind, Prabhakaran even remarked rhetorically, "Let democratic elections be held immediately in the Tamil country. We will win".

The Indian policy-makers, however, have consistently maintained that the only reason why Prabhakaran scuttled the miniaccord on the interim set-up was his perpetual fear of the ballot box.

Be that as it may, the point is that India has never had any intention of disengaging itself from Sri Lanka till a political government is installed in the Tamil region. Now that the elections in the Tamil region have been put off, let us look beyond the temporary postponement.

In the end, should the Tigers have the last laugh over the question of provincial elections, it would emphasise that they are a greater menace to the Sri Lankan polity than ever before. At least, this is the only rational reading of the situation, from Jayewardene's standpoint. The underlying reasoning is that the Tigers, in this scenario, have proved a disruptive point despite the presence of the powerful Indian force.

Should the above scenario unfold, Jayewardene would then come under enormous pressure from the Sinhalese opposition groups to show the Indians the exit door.

*But, on realpolitik considerations, Jayewardene will have to grapple with a sensitive question: If India is to be asked to leave the island for its failure to tame the Tigers, who will fill the vacuum and bring them to their knees? Obviously he cannot hope to re-deploy the Sri Lankan Army in the Tamil areas and lower the vigil in the Sinhalese region. At least, not until the J. V. P. insurgency is stamped out. And no one is yet ready to bet on a quick liquidation of the J. V. P.*

*At one stage immediately after the July accord was signed, many a diplomatic tongue wagged, suggesting that the I. P. K. F. could be called on to suppress the J. V. P. as well. Such a role for the I. P. K. F. would not infringe the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene pact, it was said. But, as we know, Jayewardene has not chosen to lean on the Indian shoulder to shoot down*

the J.V.P. rebellion, mainly because the I.P.K.F. is yet to catch the Tiger leaders by their tails.

In this situation, should the Tigers succeed in fouling up the prospects for provincial elections over an ominous span of time, as viewed from Jayewardene's angle, he cannot also easily invite the Pakistani or, indeed, a S.A.A.R.C. army to replace the I.P.K.F.

Pakistan, or even S.A.A.R.C. may not be enthusiastic over such a prospect. The Indian predicament in dealing with the Tigers will, no doubt, loom large as a disincentive to step into the I.P.K.F.'s boots. Of course, the I.P.K.F. has had to restrain itself in the pursuit of the Tigers, in view of India's friendly political relations with them in the past.

Yet, should Jayewardene invite Pakistan or even a S.A.A.R.C. army, to replace the I.P.K.F., he will still face the charge of bartering away Sri Lankan sovereignty. Above all, India will not give way to the Pakistani or a S.A.A.R.C. army. In fact, prior to the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene accord, India shot down the idea of inducting a S.A.A.R.C. army instead of an Indian peace force, to keep the peace in Sri Lanka. Therefore, Jayewardene cannot invite some other foreign army and give the I.P.K.F. its marching orders.

Let us take a look at another possible scenario. If both the Tigers and the J.V.P. succeed in ruining the prospects for provincial elections indefinitely, Jayewardene cannot think of asking India to retreat immediately at all. Because, in that case, India would have to leave behind a truly troubled island — a daunting prospect for the Sri Lankan Government to handle on its own.

This brings us to another possible scenario. If both the Tigers and the J.V.P. eventually fail to ruin the poll chances on a long-term basis, India could well claim the credit for putting the Tigers on a leash, even if it was at a slow pace. India could also say that the I.P.K.F., by pinning down the Tigers, had indirectly helped the Sri Lankan Government to wage the war against the J.V.P., free of the worry of a parallel menace from the Tigers. In this hypothetical situation, India could still stay on in the island and pursue its geo-political interests.

A rational assessment of the possible scenarios, therefore, leads to the conclusion that India is Jayewardene's best bet to maintain peace on the island, at least as long as he remains as President.

Sinhalese and Indian politicians who have had any dealings with Jayewardene feel that the Sri Lankan President may think many times over before ordering the next presidential election. No doubt, under the present Sri Lankan constitution he cannot hope to prolong his rule beyond February 1989. But he himself is its architect.

So, given his style of functioning, many observers expect him to come up with a plausible political pretext to postpone the presidential election.

They do not also put it beyond his political acumen to give himself yet another term as President. Already, by mid-March 1988, reports had appeared in a section of the island's press suggesting that Jayewardene might amend the Sri Lankan Constitution so that he could contest for a third successive term of the Presidency.

Should Jayewardene succeed in lifting the passing clouds of uncertainty over his right to seek another term as President, will he help India come out of the peace trap in which it finds itself?

Already, he has made a helpful move, from India's standpoint. With remarkable political grace, he suddenly made a conciliatory gesture towards the Tigers on February 25, 1988. He said he would extend political amnesty to the Tigers if they were to accept the July accord and lay down arms. This was by no means a new olive-branch offered to the Tigers. In effect, Jayewardene was just repeating an offer which he first made in the afterglow of the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement. But that concession was later annulled when the Tigers ran riot, killing the Sinhalese living in the Tamil region — following the suicidal death of the twelve Tigers in Sri Lankan custody.

Putting all those memories behind him, Jayewardene added a new dimension to his proposal of February 25, 1988. Should the I.P.K.F. succeed in disarming the Tigers, without the Tigers themselves giving up violence, the amnesty offer would still hold good, he said.

The presidential offer was actually one part of a twin deal. He also held out the olive-branch and amnesty to the Sinhalese 'terrorist' group, the J.V.P.

Take the case of the "southern terrorists", as the J.V.P. campaigners are called, in view of their southern base. There was, of course, no presidential mention of any proposition that the J.V.P. elements would be pardoned, should the I.P.K.F. disarm them, when they by themselves would not bid goodbye to arms. In other words, the J.V.P. militia would have to give up violence all on its own, so as to secure presidential clemency.

The President also did not talk of the possibility of giving amnesty to the J.V.P., should the Sri Lankan armed forces disband it successfully.

But both the Tamil and Sinhalese 'terrorists' were treated alike in one crucial respect. They would be eligible to participate in the provincial polls, when held, on receiving amnesty.

On the whole, the President's amnesty offer to the Tigers will, no doubt, clear up a few uncertainties in the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lankan accord. For instance, the clemency offer could be dangled as a political carrot before the defiant Tigers.

But the presidential offer was, in itself, an answer to the brutal slaying of Vijaya Kumaranatunga, who was gradually emerging as a charismatic politician of the Sinhalese left, with some appeal to the island's Tamils are well. The J.V.P., as we know, had claimed responsibility for his cruel murder.

In trying to wean the J.V.P. away from violence, through the amnesty bait, Jayewardene could not, at the same time, ignore the continuing violence of the Tigers. Therefore, he made the offer to the Tigers as well.

Whatever the reasons, the President's offer to the Tigers has come as a shot in the arm to the relentless Indian effort for peace and politics in the Tamil region of the island.

Prabhakaran has, no doubt, a few cards up his sleeve to confound India. He maybe on the run, following the reported I.P.K.F. success in smashing his fall-back headquarters in the northern jungles in March 1988. But, all the same, he is obviously keeping his powder dry, both in respect of guerilla warfare as well as the political-diplomatic tussle with India.

*The Indian military and political intelligence authorities are believed to have caught a scent of Prabhakaran's latest game-plan. He is said to be toying with the idea of forming a government-in-exile, if only to embarrass India. While no hard evidence has come to hand, the Indian intelligence sleuths were, at least till April 1988, following the scent.*

*A suitable spot in a Western country may be chosen as the venue for a clandestine government-in-exile. This, too, is still a theory doing the rounds in the closed-circuit quarters of Indian intelligence personnel. Some Indian officials even suspect that Prabhakaran is being actively 'tutored' on a realpolitik basis, by a foreign power, or powers, not exactly friendly towards India.*

*All these strands of thought and speculation, as well as some interesting clues, underline the fact that India's active intervention in Sri Lanka has made the superpowers sit up and think.*

*This brings us to the inevitable question: What is India's geo-political game in Sri Lanka? Taking a cue from Laski, the political scientist who wrote of the "grammar of politics", it could be said that India is now learning the grammar of geo-politics.*

*India's primary interest is to keep the big power rivalries out of the Indian Ocean, to the extent possible. For this, the control of Trincomalee, the strategic port on Sri Lanka's east coast, is essential.*

*In fact, as noted at the beginning, the July accord has given India a say over how best the port could be administered in a political-diplomatic world.*

*So far, India has not made any decisive move to exercise its new right over Trincomalee. Mainly because, Delhi is yet to extricate itself from the peace trap in which it is struggling.*

But Delhi's acquisition of the right over Trincomalee has, no doubt, warmed the cockles of the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev's heart. The Soviet Union, it must be stated, has been India's steadfast friend in international politics. And, as every schoolboy knows, a friend in need is a friend indeed.

It may be recalled that the Kremlin authorities of the day exercised a veto in the United Nations Security Council to enable India to liberate East Pakistan and create Bangladesh. At the time, the U.S., under Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, had wanted India to roll back its political drive in the then East Pakistan.

The United States, normally a friend of Pakistan, also called for an immediate halt to the Indian military operation in East Pakistan. It was at this stage that the U.S.S.R. cast the veto and gave a thrust to the Indian initiative in East Pakistan. Shortly before the veto, the then Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, had entered into a treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union.

Actually, the U.S.S.R. has come to India's diplomatic rescue on quite a few occasions, both before and after the treaty of 1971. Of course, this is an over-simplified statement, which does not, at the same time, falsify the facts. In any case, the purpose here is not to analyse the history of Indo-Soviet political relations.

*The question of Indo-Soviet friendship has, immense relevance for Delhi's active involvement in Sri Lanka. It is often asked whether India is playing the Soviet Union's proxy-game in securing a hold over Trincomalee.*

No doubt, the U.S.S.R. is pleased that Trincomalee has not fallen into U.S. hands, with India stepping in and seeking to take control there. But there is no evidence to suggest that the Soviet Union, for its part, had earlier desired to get a foothold in Trincomalee. In fact, the state of relations between Jayewardene and the Soviet leaders would have ruled out any such Soviet ambition.

Yet, there is a theory that the U.S.S.R. also did not expect the U.S. to seek and get control over Trincomalee. The reasoning is as follows: Should the U.S. enter Trincomalee, the U.S.S.R. would not be far behind, by seeking and perhaps getting a similar base in the neighbourhood, so as to counter the U.S. Obviously, in this context, the Indo-Soviet friendship is projected as a key factor in the American thinking on the subject of Trincomalee as a military base.

Be that as it may, the latest dispensation over the future of Trincomalee, as outlined in the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement, is very much acceptable to

*the Soviet Union. After all, the July accord was signed soon after Rajiv Gandhi visited Moscow and conferred with Gorbachev.*

*Some observers even believe that India's geo-political gain on the Trincomalee issue is, in effect, Delhi's reciprocal 'gift' to the Soviet Union. The 'gift' is to fulfil India's 'debt of gratitude' to the Soviet Union for all its acts of diplomatic friendship over the years.*

At the same time, it must also be noted that the U.S. Government indeed welcomed the July accord. Washington is not known to mince its words if its vital interests are affected. Therefore, the logical question is why did the U.S. welcome the Rajiv Gandhi-Jayewardene pact.

The American acknowledgment of the July agreement is basically a recognition of India's growing stature as the regional superpower. Secondly, the U.S. was not in the mood to get sucked into the vortex of another Asian imbroglio. After all, its hands are full in Central America, and it has some need for a detente with the Soviet Union.

Interestingly, the U.S. did not also back Jayewardene when he wanted to launch a "fight to the finish" against the Sri Lankan Tamil guerillas. This was on the eve of the July agreement, even as India signalled its readiness to intervene in Sri Lanka. The reference here is to the famous pie-in-the-sky mission which has been discussed. In the circumstances, Jayewardene could not but sign the July accord. He was not only hoping to get India to do his 'dirty work' by taming the Tigers but also to show up India as a regional policeman on the prowl.

With the outbreak of the Indo-Tiger war, which was definitely not engineered by Jayewardene, it may have been tempting for the U.S. Government to fish in the troubled waters. But, so far, there is no clinching evidence of any such U.S. move. The Delhi minions are apparently assessing if the theory would turn out to be true. Obviously, all these diplomatic possibilities are a matter for sensitive espionage and counter-espionage.

As for India's status as a regional superpower, the Indo-Tiger war has put the diplomatic clock back on such issues as the elimination of Pakistani and Israeli advisers, as mentioned in the July accord and the related papers.

These delays have brought into sharp focus the question as to when and how India can come out of the peace trap in Sri Lanka.

Some people have compared India's latest predicament in Sri Lanka with the U.S. fiasco in Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s. Some others have drawn a parallel with the Soviet 'misadventure' in Afghanistan. Both analogies are wholly irrelevant. Unlike in these two cases, there is no political-ideological dimension to the Indian adventure in Sri Lanka.

*Indeed, India's crisis in Sri Lanka is in a class of its own. The crisis could be traced to inadequate homework on such aspects as Prabhakaran's potential for political mischief, the Sinhalese anti-Indian anger etc.*

*The question uppermost in the minds of Indians and others is: Can India pull itself out of the peace trap? The answer is 'yes'. But India will require a lot of skill in the military, political and diplomatic spheres. What, then, is India's agenda for tomorrow?*

*India will have to disarm the Tigers militarily without making a permanent enemy of the Sri Lankan Tamil civilians. Politically, India will have to bridge the gulf between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. And, on the diplomatic front, Delhi will have to convince the Sri Lankan Government that it is in the latter's own interest to give India a long-term say in the island's affairs.*

*Rajiv Gandhi should not repeat the mistake of withdrawing in a hurry, as India did in the case of Bangladesh in 1971. At the same time, the prestige earned by a total withdrawal from Bangladesh must not be allowed to go up in smoke in Sri Lanka now. This is a tall order, no doubt. Yet, it is within the reach of a real-time regional superpower.*

# Postscript

AT the end of April, 1988, as we went to press, the stalemate in the Indo-Tiger war continued to dominate the minds of the Indian and Sri Lankan authorities, not to speak of the minds of the Tamil Tigers themselves. No doubt, the I.P.K.F. had by then gained a decisive upper hand in the military operations, with the Tigers reportedly on the run in several areas of the island's Tamil region. But, as the Tiger leaders would not give up their guerilla war, the I.P.K.F. was in no position to sit back and relax.

Informally, the word was spread that peace could be restored in the Sri Lankan Tamil region by about June-July 1988. Yet, no policy-maker was prepared to stick his neck out and predict the elimination of the Tamil Tigers.

At the same time, the Indian Prime Minister made it clear that Delhi would not negotiate with the Tigers unless they gave up arms and accepted the Indo-Sri Lankan accord of July 1987. He was replying to questions from journalists at the All-India Congress (Indira) Committee meeting held on April 22, 1988.

At this Congress(I) meeting, held near Madras so as to prepare Rajiv Gandhi's party to face a prospective general election in Tamil Nadu before the year is out, the Indian Prime Minister did not choose to humour the local electorate by showing a conciliatory attitude towards the Tamil Tigers. Obviously, he was satisfied that the people of Tamil Nadu would not back the Tigers blindly.

But the seasoned Congress(I) politicians from Tamil Nadu were not so sanguine on this issue. According to them, the silent manner in which the people of Tamil Nadu, by and large, acquiesced in the Indian action against the Tigers could not be taken for granted even at the time of the prospective general election in the State. The regional parties, which swear by the Tamil language and culture, could whip up popular passions for a few days at the time of the polls to foul up the Congress(I)'s chances, they felt.

## Appendix I

# A background brief

**G**EORGE Bernard Shaw is said to have observed that the English and the Americans are separated by a common language. The same thing could be said of the Tamils of India and the Sri Lankan Tamils. They speak the same language, but they do not act together in cultural and political unison. The Sri Lankan Tamils, otherwise known as Eelam Tamils, after 'Eelam' — the Tamil word for the island of Sri Lanka — trace their ancestry to the Tamil areas of the Indian sub-continent. Yet, there is no collective social memory of any sailings of the Tamils from India to Sri Lanka, unlike in the case of the original voyage from Britain to what is today the United States of America.

The Sri Lankan Tamils believe that their ancestors predated the arrival of the Sinhalese in the island by a few centuries before Christ. The Sinhalese, who constitute an overwhelming majority in the island, also look to India for their ancestral roots. The original Sinhalese, according to one of the most popular theories, migrated from the Bengal-Bihar-Orissa belt of the Indian sub-continent. The truth is, however, lost in the misty antiquity of history.

Prince Vijaya is claimed to be the legendary founder of the Sinhalese people, though there is no verifiable historical evidence to support this legend or the cultural myth of his Indian origins. Buddhism, which the great majority of Sinhalese practise to this day, despite some historical vicissitudes, was originally carried to Sri Lanka from India during the ancient regime of Emperor Asoka, who reigned over the length and breadth of India, except, ironically, some of the areas which today constitute Tamil Nadu.

On the other hand, most Sri Lankan Tamils follow the same tenets of Hinduism which their Tamil counterparts in India adhere to. Modern Sri Lanka is, thus, ethnically divided on Sinhalese-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu lines.

In the course of its historical evolution, Sri Lanka has also played host to other faiths, like Christianity and Islam. While the European colonial powers, like the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, nurtured Christianity in Sri Lanka, the medieval Arab traders are believed to have taken Islam to Sri Lanka's shores and it is for this reason most Sri Lankan Muslims are known as Moors.

Today, the Islamic faith is practised by a sizeable section of the population in the Eastern Province and most of them are Tamil-speaking. Sri Lanka is also the home of another, albeit tiny, group of Muslims, the Malays, who first arrived

in the island as part of the conquering Dutch forces. The island's colonial links account for the small community of Burghers.

The British rulers gave Sri Lanka a legacy of a different kind, namely, the so-called Indian Tamils. These Tamils, who are also known as the plantation Tamils, work mostly on the island's various plantations in the central highlands. Their predecessors were first transported from India to the island in the late 19th century, when Britain ruled both the countries. When Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, the 'Indian Tamils' were soon deprived of their right of franchise. This gradually led to a serious problem of 'statelessness' among these plantation Tamils.

India and Sri Lanka entered into bilateral agreements in 1964, 1974 and 1986 to settle this issue. To simplify the maze of details, these agreements, not to be confused with the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of July 1987, provide for the repatriation of agreed numbers of plantation Tamils to India. Matching the phased repatriation, Sri Lanka has variously agreed to absorb numbers of the plantation Tamils as its own citizens. But the problem of 'statelessness' is still hanging fire, for reasons outside the scope of this book.

The overwhelming problem that stares Sri Lanka in its face today relates to the deep ethnic divide between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils. While the Sinhalese constitute about 74 per cent (11 millions) of the country's total population, the Sri Lankan Tamils constitute about 13 per cent (1.9 millions), according to the 1981 census.

The Sinhalese are basically a care-free people who love fun, politics and the fine things of life. They have their own internal divisions, the most notable distinction being the one between the aristocratic Kandyan of the highlands and the Low-Country Sinhalese of the plains. The Tamils, for their part, are broadly divided into the 'Jaffna Tamils' of the Northern Province and those of the Eastern Province. During British colonial rule, the 'Jaffna Tamils', by dint of hard work, attained better educational qualifications than the eastern Tamils as well as a sizeable section of the Sinhalese. The 'Jaffna Tamils' gradually found themselves in important positions in the world of government and academics. They emerged as rivals to the aristocratic Sinhalese with elitist education and background. In all this, the eastern Tamils generally found themselves out of the race for big jobs and status symbols.

This hiatus between the 'Jaffna' (or the northern) Tamils and those of the east remains unbridged to this day, adding a peculiar dimension to the internal politics of the Sri Lankan Tamils. The Tamil-speaking Muslims, who dominate sizeable pockets of the Eastern Province, identify themselves with the Tamil-Hindus for the purpose of language, but cling zealously to their religion. Of late, Muslim fundamentalism is slowly beginning to crystallise in Sri Lankan Tamil areas which have sizeable Muslim populations. Al Jihad, a militant new force among the Tamil-speaking Muslims, is said to be gaining momentum. It is allegedly aided by Pakistan, to aggravate the communal cauldron and confound India in Sri Lanka today.

Whatever be the divisions within the Sri Lankan Tamil community, it has become a collective rival to the Sinhalese in the post-independence era. While the Sinhalese have tried to translate their numerical superiority into substantial political, economic and social gains, at the expense of the Sri Lankan Tamils, the latter have tried to resist the "hegemonistic tendencies" of the Sinhalese.

The Sinhalese bandwagon of State-sponsored 'hegemonism' first began to roll in 1956, when the Sinhalese-dominated government in Colombo enacted the 'Sinhala only' Official Language Act. This caused much resentment among the Tamils and the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam pact was signed in 1957 to protect the Tamil interests. The two leaders represented the Sri Lankan Government and the island's Tamils respectively. While Bandaranaike maintained that it was not possible for him to abrogate the controversial Official Language Act, the two men agreed that Tamil could be used for administrative purposes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces (the traditional Tamil areas), without prejudice to the 'Sinhala only' Act of 1956. Jayewardene, now the President of Sri Lanka, opposed the pact and organised a protest march to Kandy. Bandaranaike promptly abrogated the pact, in 1958.

With this, the mutual suspicions between the two communities assumed a sharper edge, and the Sri Lankan military forces 'occupied' the Tamil areas for two years in the early 1960s. The Colombo government justified this action on the grounds that law and order requirements warranted steps against smuggling etc. in the Tamil areas.

In 1965, Chelvanayagam entered into a new pact, this time with Dudley Senanayake. Besides a reiteration of the earlier assurances on the use of the Tamil language, the new pact provided for a preference to the Tamils in the granting of lands under the various colonisation schemes as well as preferential economic benefits such as irrigation etc. But this pact also found its way into the dustbin of history.

When discriminatory standards were applied against Tamil students seeking entry to universities, during Sirimavo Bandaranaike's regime, the Tamil youth was enraged, giving birth to separatist tendencies. Sri Lankan police atrocities at an international Tamil conference in Jaffna in 1974 set the stage for Chelvanayagam to ask for a separate Tamil State. Then the youths took over, resulting in today's developments.

## Appendix II

# A historic accord

### INDO-SRI LANKA AGREEMENT TO ESTABLISH PEACE AND NORMALCY IN SRI LANKA

**T**HE President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. J. R. Jayewardene, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, having met at Colombo on July 29, 1987,

Attaching utmost importance to nurturing, intensifying and strengthening the traditional friendship of Sri Lanka and India, and acknowledging the imperative need of resolving the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka, and the consequent violence, and for the safety, well-being and prosperity of people belonging to all communities in Sri Lanka,

Have this day entered into the following Agreement to fulfil this objective.

In this context,

1.1 *desiring* to preserve the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka;

1.2 *acknowledging* that Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic and a multi-lingual plural society consisting, *inter alia*, of Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims (Moors), and Burghers;

1.3 *recognising* that each ethnic group has a distinct cultural and linguistic identity which has to be carefully nurtured;

1.4 *also recognising* that the Northern and the Eastern Provinces have been areas of historical habitation of Sri Lankan Tamil speaking peoples, who have at all times hitherto lived together in this territory with other ethnic groups;

1.5 *conscious* of the necessity of strengthening the forces contributing to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, and preserving its character as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious plural society, in which all citizens can live in equality, safety and harmony, and prosper and fulfil their aspirations;

2. *Resolve that:*

2.1 Since the Government of Sri Lanka proposes to permit adjoining Provinces to join to form one administrative unit and also by a Referendum to separate as may be permitted to the Northern and Eastern Provinces as outlined below:

2.2 During the period, which shall be considered an interim period, (i.e. from the date of the elections to the Provincial Council, as specified in para 2.8 to the date of the referendum as specified in para 2.3,) the Northern and Eastern Provinces as now constituted, will form one administrative unit, having one elected Provincial Council. Such a unit will have one Governor, one Chief Minister and one Board of Ministers.

2.3 There will be a referendum on or before 31st December, 1988 to enable the people of the Eastern Province to decide whether:

- (a) The Eastern Province should remain linked with the Northern Province as one administrative unit, and continue to be governed together with the Northern Province as specified in para 2.2, or
- (b) The Eastern Province should constitute a separate administrative unit having its own distinct Provincial Council with a separate Governor, Chief Minister and Board of Ministers.

The President may, at his discretion, decide to postpone such a referendum.

2.4 All persons who have been displaced due to ethnic violence, or other reasons, will have the right to vote in such a referendum. Necessary conditions to enable them to return to areas from where they were displaced will be created.

2.5 The referendum, when held, will be monitored by a committee headed by the Chief Justice; a member appointed by the President, nominated by the Government of Sri Lanka; and a member appointed by the President, nominated by the representatives of the Tamil speaking people of the Eastern Province.

2.6 A simple majority will be sufficient to determine the result of the referendum.

2.7 Meetings and other forms of propaganda, permissible within the laws of the country, will be allowed before the referendum.

2.8 Elections to Provincial Councils will be held within the next three months, in any event before 31st December 1987. Indian observers will be invited for elections to the Provincial Council of the North and East.

2.9 The Emergency will be lifted in the Eastern and Northern Provinces by August 15, 1987. A cessation of hostilities will come into effect all over the Island within 48 hours of the signing of this Agreement. All arms presently held by militant groups will be surrendered in accordance with an agreed procedure to authorities to be designated by the Government of Sri Lanka.

Consequent to the cessation of hostilities and the surrender of arms by militant groups, the Army and other security personnel will be confined to barracks in camps as on 25th May 1987. The process of surrendering of arms and the confining of security personnel moving back to barracks shall be completed within 72 hours of the cessation of hostilities coming into effect.

2.10 The Government of Sri Lanka will utilise for the purpose of law enforcement and maintenance of security in the Northern and Eastern Provinces the same organisations and mechanisms of Government as are used in the rest of the country.

2.11 The President of Sri Lanka will grant a general amnesty to political and other prisoners now held in custody under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and other Emergency laws, and to combatants, as well as to those persons accused, charged and/or convicted under these laws. The Government of Sri Lanka will make special efforts to rehabilitate militant youth with a view to bringing them back into the mainstream of national life. India will co-operate in the process.

2.12 The Government of Sri Lanka will accept and abide by the above provisions and expect all others to do likewise.

2.13 If the framework for the resolutions is accepted, the Government of Sri Lanka will implement the relevant proposals forthwith.

2.14 The Government of India will underwrite and guarantee the resolutions, and co-operate in the implementation of these proposals.

2.15 These proposals are conditional to an acceptance of the proposals negotiated from 4.5.1986 to 19.12.1986. Residual matters not finalised during the above negotiations shall be resolved between India and Sri Lanka within a period of six weeks of signing this Agreement. These proposals are also conditional to the Government of India co-operating directly with the Government of Sri Lanka in their implementation.

2.16 These proposals are also conditional to the Government of India taking the following actions if any militant groups operating in Sri Lanka do not accept this framework of proposals for a settlement, namely,

- (a) India will take all necessary steps to ensure that Indian territory is not used for activities prejudicial to the unity, integrity and security of Sri Lanka.
- (b) The Indian Navy/Coast Guard will co-operate with the Sri Lanka Navy in preventing Tamil militant activities from affecting Sri Lanka.
- (c) In the event that the Government of Sri Lanka requests the Government of India to afford military assistance to implement these proposals the Government of India will co-operate by giving to the Government of Sri Lanka such military assistance as and when requested.
- (d) The Government of India will expedite repatriation from Sri Lanka of Indian citizens to India who are resident here, concurrently with the repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from Tamil Nadu.
- (e) The Governments of Sri Lanka and India will co-operate in ensuring the physical security and safety of all communities inhabiting the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

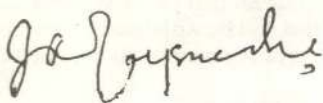
2.17 The Government of Sri Lanka shall ensure free, full and fair participation of voters from all communities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces in electoral processes envisaged in this Agreement. The Government of India will extend full co-operation to the Government of Sri Lanka in this regard.

2.18 The official language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala. Tamil and English will also be official languages.

3. This Agreement and the annexure thereto shall come into force upon signature.

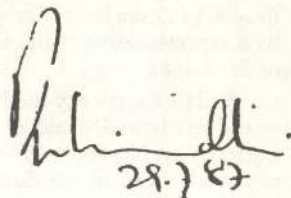
IN WITNESS WHEREOF we have set our hands and seals hereunto.

DONE in COLOMBO, SRI LANKA, on this the Twenty Ninth day of July of the year One Thousand Nine Hundred and Eighty Seven, in duplicate, both texts being equally authentic.



**Junius Richard Jayewardene**

*President of the  
Democratic Socialist  
Republic of Sri Lanka*



**Rajiv Gandhi**

*Prime Minister of the  
Republic of India*

## ANNEXURE TO THE AGREEMENT

1. His Excellency the President of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of India agree that the referendum mentioned in paragraph 2 and its sub-paragraphs of the Agreement will be observed by a representative of the Election Commission of India to be invited by His Excellency the President of Sri Lanka.

2. Similarly, both Heads of Government agree that the elections to the Provincial Council mentioned in paragraph 2.8 of the Agreement will be observed by a representative of the Government of India to be invited by the President of Sri Lanka.

3. His Excellency the President of Sri Lanka agrees that the Home Guards would be disbanded and all para-military personnel will be withdrawn from the Eastern and Northern Provinces with a view to creating conditions conducive to fair elections to the Council.

The President, in his discretion, shall absorb such para-military forces, which came into being due to ethnic violence, into the regular security forces of Sri Lanka.

4. The President of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of India agree that the Tamil militants shall surrender their arms to authorities agreed upon to be designated by the President of Sri Lanka. The surrender shall take place in the presence of one senior representative each of the Sri Lanka Red Cross and the Indian Red Cross.

5. The President of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of India agree that a joint Indo-Sri Lankan observer group consisting of qualified representatives of the Government of Sri Lanka and the Government of India would monitor the cessation of hostilities from 31 July, 1987.

6. The President of Sri Lanka and the Prime Minister of India also agree that in terms of paragraph 2.14 and paragraph 2.16 (c) of the Agreement, an Indian Peace Keeping Contingent may be invited by the President of Sri Lanka to guarantee and enforce the cessation of hostilities, if so required.



PRIME MINISTER

July 29, 1987

Excellency,

Conscious of the friendship between our two countries stretching over two millennia and more, and recognising the importance of nurturing this traditional friendship, it is imperative that both Sri Lanka and India reaffirm the decision not to allow our respective territories to be used for activities prejudicial to each other's unity, territorial integrity and security.

2. In this spirit, you had, during the course of our discussions, agreed to meet some of India's concerns as follows:

- (i) Your Excellency and myself will reach an early understanding about the relevance and employment of foreign military and intelligence personnel with a view to ensuring that such presences will not prejudice Indo-Sri Lankan relations;
- (ii) Trincomalee or any other ports in Sri Lanka will not be made available for military use by any country in a manner prejudicial to India's interests;
- (iii) The work of restoring and operating the Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm will be undertaken as a joint venture between India and Sri Lanka;
- (iv) Sri Lanka's agreement with foreign broadcasting organizations will be reviewed to ensure that any facilities set up by them in Sri Lanka are used solely as public broadcasting facilities and not for any military or intelligence purposes.

3. In the same spirit, India will:

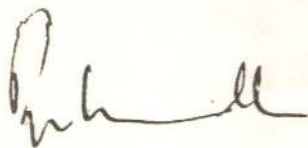
- (i) Deport all Sri Lankan citizens who are found to be engaging in terrorist activities or advocating separatism or secessionism;
- (ii) Provide training facilities and military supplies for Sri Lankan security forces.

4. India and Sri Lanka have agreed to set up a joint consultative mechanism to continuously review matters of common concern in the light of the objectives stated in para 1 and specifically to monitor the implementation of other matters contained in this letter.

5. Kindly confirm, Excellency, that the above correctly sets out the agreement reached between us.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Rajiv Gandhi', with a stylized, flowing script.

**Rajiv Gandhi**

His Excellency Mr. J.R. Jayewardene,  
President of the Democratic Socialist  
Republic of Sri Lanka,  
Colombo.



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இலங்கையின் சனாதிபதி  
PRESIDENT OF SRI LANKA

July 29, 1987

Excellency,

Please refer to your letter dated the 29th of July 1987, which reads as follows:—

“Excellency,

Conscious of the friendship between our two countries stretching over two millennia and more, and recognizing the importance of nurturing this traditional friendship, it is imperative that both Sri Lanka and India reaffirm the decision not to allow our respective territories to be used for activities prejudicial to each other's unity, territorial integrity and security.

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(iii) The work of restoring and operating the Trincomalee Oil Tank Farm will be undertaken as a joint venture between India and Sri Lanka.

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5. Kindly, confirm, Excellency, that the above correctly sets out the agreement reached between us.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

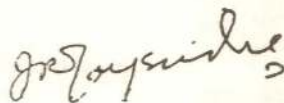
**(Rajiv Gandhi)**

His Excellency  
Mr. J.R. Jayewardene,  
President of the Democratic Socialist  
Republic of Sri Lanka,  
Colombo."

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This is to confirm that the above correctly sets out the understanding reached between us.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



**J.R. Jayewardene**  
President

His Excellency  
Mr. Rajiv Gandhi,  
Prime Minister of the Republic of India,  
New Delhi.







*The Peace Trap* is a candid portrait of the political storm which is still raging around the Indo-Sri Lankan accord of July 29, 1987. The continuing crisis in implementing the accord is presented against a background of the issues and personalities involved. The 'peace trap' is, in itself, a delightful new expression that summarises India's political dilemmas in bringing peace to Sri Lanka. The book also captures the changing moods and methods of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, with the author drawing on his intimate journalistic contacts with Prabhakaran, the leader of the Tamil Tigers. The book, focussing briefly on the Sri Lankan Government's worries as well, is an introductory work by a political journalist who has been a witness to some of the major developments in contemporary Indo-Sri Lankan relations.

The author, Pisupati Sadasiva Suryanarayana (P.S. Suryanarayana) is a Senior Staff Correspondent of the *Financial Express*, an important publication of the Indian Express group. Based in Madras, he has been covering political and economic events on a day-to-day basis. He visited Sri Lanka to study the political and ethnic crisis there. Born in Salem (Tamil Nadu — India) on July 15, 1949, Suryanarayana gave up a prestigious Indian government service job in 1976 to plunge into the exciting world of daily journalism. He worked as a reporter with the *Indian Express* and *The Hindu* in Madras before joining the *Financial Express*. He has a Master's degree in Politics and Public Administration (Madras University).

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