

LTTE Cabal opposes “KP” as leader of re-structured Tigers

Friday 24 July 2009, by [JEYARAJ David Buell Sabapathy](#) (Date first published: 24 July 2009).

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The politico-military organization known as Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has virtually ceased to exist within the borders of Sri Lanka.

Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran and most military cadres including senior military leaders are no more among the living. Thousands of other tiger cadres including senior members of the political and administrative wings are incarcerated by the Sri Lankan authorities.

Small groups of tigers are holed up in the jungles of the Northern and Eastern provinces trying to engage in guerilla warfare of a minor scale where and when possible. Their impact is negligible.

Meanwhile covert tiger operatives are being systematically hunted down in various parts of the country by the security authorities who prefer to keep this aspect away from media attention. Likewise tigers who sought refuge clandestinely in Internally displaced person (IDP) camps are also weeded out regularly.

OVERSEAS LTTE

While the LTTE has been practically demolished in Sri Lanka it's overseas structures remain lethal.

There is a tendency to describe the tiger elements abroad as “remnants” or as a “rump” by sections of the media. This description is inaccurate.

The overseas structures of the LTTE remain intact and are as strong as ever. The LTTE continues to enjoy support and influence among substantial sections of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora.

Despite this vast potential the tiger and pro-tiger elements have been unable to mobilise or channel these resources in a realistic or productive manner so far.

The main reason for this is the disunity which surfaced in overseas LTTE ranks after the demise of Prabhakaran.

The problem in a nutshell is that of leadership stakes in a post-Prabhakaran scenario. With the overseas tiger divisions being the sole “survivor” after the military debacle there is a greater responsibility on these sections to move “forward” with the cause.

FACTIONS

In order to do this there must firstly be a realistic appreciation and awareness of the exact nature of current LTTE predicament. Secondly a pragmatic, feasible approach has to be adopted and followed. Thirdly an acceptable efficient leadership has to evolve. There is no agreement so far on any of these.

These differences have erupted on a crude, personal level. Who leads the LTTE now? Is the fundamental issue. Factionalism is rampant.

Aggravating the crisis further are the questions about lucrative sources of income abroad. Who controls them now? Can such control be effectively maintained? Can fund raising continue as usual? Will they dry up? How is fund raising to be sustained?

Among LTTE leaders known to be “living and free” Selvarasah Pathmanathan alias “K.P.” aka Kumaran is the most senior of all. KP was at one time the chief arms procurer of the LTTE. He also supervised overseas tiger branches and fund raising campaigns of the LTTE.

ROLE OF “KP”.

The role of KP was undermined in the LTTE after the ceasefire of 2002. He was relegated to the sidelines while others were groomed to replace him. Former tiger political commissar, Suppiah Paramu Thamilselvan and ex-overseas administrative head Veeragatti Manivannan alias Castro led the vicious anti-KP campaign.

Various charges of corruption, inefficiency, sexual impropriety etc were brought up against KP. The veteran tiger referred to affectionately as “Kazhuthai” (donkey) by Prabhakaran proved his innocence after protracted inquiry.

After clearing his name, a “hurt” KP went into “voluntary” retirement abroad in 2003 but maintained links with Prabhakaran. KP also married a Thai national and became domesticated.

The LTTE began suffering military reversals from 2006 onwards. A major factor was the inability of KP’s successors to procure and transport arms and armaments effectively to the northern mainland known as the Wanni. The Sri Lankan Navy aided by information provided by friendly governments destroyed eight or nine tiger ships.

A desperate Prabhakaran turned to KP in 2008 and requested him to do something. KP came out of retirement and after frantic efforts managed to send three arms shipments. One of these was blocked by the Lankan Navy but the other two reached the LTTE thereby giving much needed oxygen to the LTTE.

A grateful Prabhakaran asked KP to re-join the LTTE. Pathmanathan said he would do so if the tiger leader placed him in charge of overseas tigers. So in January 2009 a new LTTE division called international relations dept was formed and Selvarasa Pathmanathan was named its head.

COLD WAR

The new international relations head was in practice an euphemism for global tiger chief. At least that was how KP interpreted it. But Castro who was in charge of administering overseas tiger branches was not willing to relinquish control. He instructed overseas branch officials not to co-operate with KP.

This led to a “cold war” in the Diaspora between KP and Castro loyalists. It did not receive adequate attention by Prabhakaran as the beleaguered tigers were in a last ditch stand in the Karaithuraipatru AGA division of Mullaitheevu district. So KP found himself stymied by Castro.

KP himself was deeply involved in moves to bring about international pressure on Colombo and enforce a cessation of hostilities. He also attempted to bring about an arrangement with international backing through which Prabhakaran and several senior tigers could flee abroad with their families. Prabhakaran refused to comply until the last. When the LTTE supremo changed his mind it was too late.

Meanwhile KP’s quiet diplomacy in mobilising international support to bring about a respite in Sri Lanka was seriously hampered by Castro and his minions.

KP had asked overseas tigers and supporters to stage demonstrations in western cities urging humanitarian intervention in Sri Lanka. The pathetic plight of the civilians was highlighted. This was to bolster his efforts to influence western governments.

In a puerile attempt to outshine KP his rival Castro ordered the Diaspora Tamils to demonstrate in support of the LTTE and Velupillai Prabhakaran. Diaspora Tamils began carrying placards supporting LTTE and portraits of Prabhakaran. Western governments and media were shocked. The Diaspora tigers shot themselves not in the foot but the head.

Contact between the Wanni and tigers abroad was under strain as the war escalated. So Castro appointed an international representative on his behalf. This person was to be in overall charge of the LTTE overseas branches.

NEDIYAVAN

Castro’s nominee was a 33 year old named Perinpanayagam Sivaparan. He bore the nom de guerre “Nediyavan” meaning Tall man. Nediyavan had joined the LTTE when he was 18. He was sent to Russia for higher education by the LTTE but apparently Sivaparan did not complete his degree there.

Nediyavan functioned in the LTTE’s political wing and accompanied SP Thamilselvan for the 4th

round of peace talks in Thailand. Thereafter he re-located to Europe.

The LTTE during the peace talks period from 2002-2005 had sent a number of operatives abroad. Most of these cadres were from the political and intelligence wings. Nediyan took up residence in Norway.

Sivaparan alias Nediyan married Sivagowri Shanthamohan. Her father's brother was Gnanendramohan alias Ranjan Lala. Gnanendramohan was one of the pioneering members of the LTTE and a trusted confidante of Prabhakaran. Ranjan Lala was shot in Jaffna by the Army when riding a motor cycle.

This matrimonial alliance strengthened Nediyan's clout within the LTTE. With Castro's authority he spearheaded resistance to KP taking over as global tiger chief. The cold war erupted openly abroad after the LTTE's military debacle. Castro himself committed suicide in Mullivaikkal.

LEADERSHIP

Realistically all that was left of an "active" LTTE was its overseas structure. Thus the overseas chief would in practical terms be the head of a post-Prabhakaran LTTE. When KP tried to don the leadership mantle, Nediyan opposed it. He was supported by an assortment of Diasporic tigers united in being against KP.

The anti-KP sections launched a vicious campaign maligning and vilifying KP.

He was charged of betraying Prabhakaran to the armed forces on the one hand and on the other, of hiding the truth that Prabhakaran was alive. KP was accused of being in the pay of various international espionage agencies. A story was also spread that KP had passed information about tiger "cargo" vessels to the Lankan navy.

Though KP and his bona fides was well-known to informed circles of an older generation the younger elements of the LTTE abroad and most Diaspora supporters knew very little about him. So it was easy for his opponents to attack KP.

Besides with the LTTE overseas offices and institutions being controlled by Nediyan it was virtually impossible for KP to put his point of view across. Most tiger media organs blacked out KP while several websites kept on attacking him. KP was even compelled to start his own website and express his opinion.

SETBACK

A major setback for KP was the attitude of Tamil Nadu tiger supporters like Nedumaran and Vaiko. KP reportedly spent hours on the telephone explaining his position. After seemingly agreeing both went on to criticise KP publicly and take up the stance that Prabhakaran was alive.

KP's weak point was his hasty announcement on May 18th that Prabhakaran was alive in a safe place. Later he revised his position but KP's detractors keep on questioning him as to why he made that statement in the first place and why he went back on it subsequently.

Initially, KP's opponents scored on the Prabhakaran being alive issue. With many supporters unable

to accept reality or reconcile themselves to Prabhakaran's death there was a widespread state of denial.

In that mood KP's proclamation that Prabhakaran was dead and his declaration of a week of mourning evoked hostile reactions. Anti-KP elements refused to comply with Pathmanathan's directives.

As a result there has been no public event paying homage to Prabhakaran or senior tiger leaders so far. This from a movement which makes a fetish out of death and glorifies its departed cadres in a ceremony called Great Heroes day.

The intra-LTTE divisions were clearly brought out in the different opinions expressed. KP and his supporters acknowledge that Prabhakaran and other seniors are no more, commemorate them and move forward. But those opposed to KP refuse to admit the leader is no more.

KP and associates want to transform the LTTE. They make a virtue out of necessity and say there cannot be an armed struggle. They want to pursue the struggle through accepted non-violent and democratic means. Most anti-KP elements refuse to accept reality and engage in rhetoric about continuing the armed struggle.

DIVIDED

Against this backdrop of a divided Diaspora, KP began initiating a series of discussions with prominent LTTE supporters abroad. He explained his position and even provided copies of correspondence with the LTTE leadership.

Audio tapes of conversations were also supplied. As a result KP managed to convert several to his point of view.

While some loyal old hands rallied around KP, the veteran tiger received support from others too.

Earlier the LTTE's overseas intelligence wing had issued a statement contradicting KP on the question of Prabhakaran being alive. This strengthened KP's adversaries.

But in a remarkable reversal the intelligence revised its position and admitted that Prabhakaran was no more. A senior intelligence wing official issued a statement under the name Kathirgamathamby Arivazhagan and cleared KP indirectly.

Arivazhagan had earlier worked closely with Lt. Col Charles head of LTTE's military intelligence division. He is reportedly in a location outside Sri Lanka.

Furthermore the intelligence wing operatives also conducted an opinion survey among tiger supporters abroad. Most of those interviewed were vintage loyalists who stood by the LTTE in the early years and not those who flocked to the tiger banner in later years.

The majority of those interviewed opined that KP should be the interim leader at this juncture.

Another branch of the LTTE with operatives abroad were the sea tigers. Some sea tiger representatives involved with "purchasing" are scattered in various countries. These cadres also threw in their lot with KP.

Thus the intelligence wing and sea tiger cadres supported KP in full force. Gradually several political

wing operatives also began spurning Nediyan and turning towards KP.

DIALOGUE

The intelligence wing then expanded its role by promoting direct dialogue between KP and Nediyan. There commenced a cycle of conference calls between KP and his supporters and Nediyan and cohorts. The proverbial midnight oil was burnt in many countries as globally dispersed tiger activists in different time zones conversed among themselves via telephone and Skype.

Interestingly, what transpired during these discussions was the fact that Nediyan and most of his coterie were fully aware that the leader Prabhakaran and his senior deputies were all dead. This was in contrast to many ordinary supporters who erroneously but genuinely believe Prabhakaran is alive.

In spite of subscribing privately to the truth the anti-KP elements were posturing differently in public. This was due to two reasons.

One was that acknowledgement of Prabhakaran's death would thoroughly demoralize supporters as he was the solitary sun in the LTTE universe. The immortality myth around Prabhakaran had to be sustained to promote the struggle.

More practically, the Prabha myth was needed to garner funds from the Diaspora and carry on in a business as usual fashion. For this the illusion of a continuing armed struggle was necessary.

The Nediyan cabal believed that the Diaspora cash cow could be milked only by the mass deception that Prabhakaran was alive and the armed struggle was going on.

RESPONSIBILITIES

According to sources close to KP the international relations head had stated that Prabhakaran had tasked him with two responsibilities in the last stages.

One was to facilitate the speedy re-settlement of Wanni IDP's. The other was to facilitate the early release of captured/surrendered cadres and families. KP had played tapes of his final conversation with Prabhakaran to drive these points home.

Pathmanathan according to informed sources had said that the best way to fulfill the leader's wishes would be to say farewell to the armed struggle.

If the LTTE abandoned violence and democratized itself a strong case could be made out for speedy IDP re-settlement and release of cadres in custody.

Also a non-violent LTTE may be able to shed its "terrorist" image and get the ban on tigers removed in Western Countries.

KP also argued strongly that the death of Prabhakaran and other senior leaders had to be accepted publicly and due homage paid.

This was the least they could do to honour the memory of their incomparable leader and other commanders who had devoted the greater parts of their lives to the cause and struggle.

“We owe it to them. It’s our sacred duty” KP reportedly emphasised.

He also stated that a large amount of funds was necessary only to purchase arms. Since the armed struggle phase had ended massive fund raising was unnecessary.

KP pointed out that the legitimate businesses run by the LTTE abroad along with voluntary contributions by hard-core supporters was enough to continue with the LTTE’s political project.

Quoting Prabhakaran’s speech at Suthumalai on August 5th 1987 where the tiger supremo said that the nature of the struggle could change while the goal remained constant, KP urged a change of policy and approach.

“COL” SURESH

According to KP’s confidantes he advocated a transformation of the LTTE in form and substance. In view of the changed politico-military environment prevailing in Sri Lanka, KP emphasised that a tiger transition was imperative.

KP’s hands were further strengthened by the intervention of two senior tigers of “colonel” rank. One was Suresh a.k.a Amuthan. The other was Ram.

Suresh is from Mannar district and was at one time the political wing head for the district when Bhanu was Mannar military commander. He fell foul of Thamilselvan later and was sidelined for some years

Consequently Suresh became a deputy to Bhanu again when the latter was placed in charge of the Kittu Artillery unit. When the LTTE began de-sanskritising names Suresh adopted the new nom de guerre Amuthan.

He became a full-fledged leader of a fighting formation and was injured in April this year.

Amuthan was spirited away by sea to a foreign location to receive advanced medical treatment. After recovering Suresh/Amuthan re-located to another country. He began interacting with tiger elements abroad and has been playing a useful role in strengthening KP’s hand.

“COL” RAM

The other was none other than the Amparai-Batticaloa LTTE military commander “Col” Ram. Hailing from the Amparai district Ram remained loyal to Prabhakaran after Karuna’s revolt.

After the bulk of LTTE cadres vacated the East in 2007 a force of 150 -200 cadres remained in the jungles of Amparai and Batticaloa districts under “Col” Ram and “Lt.Col” Nagulan.

These cadres engaged in low-intensity guerilla warfare amidst a hostile, adverse environment. After the Wanni debacle the future of these eastern cadres became uncertain.

The Diaspora elements boasting of a continuing armed struggle cited “Col” Ram and his cadres as proof of it. These selfish, irresponsible “vocal warriors” wanted these poor eastern cadres to fight a lost battle so that the Diaspora could fantasise .

To KP’s credit he quietly set about ensuring the safety of these beleaguered cadres. Assistance was

provided through an “incredible” channel to disperse the eastern cadres.

While many returned home or to safe places elsewhere a group of senior eastern cadres including Ram and political wing head Dayamohan were shipped out from the eastern coast to a foreign location. A second group got out a few days later.

“Col” Ram too began supporting KP in intra-LTTE discussions. Along with Suresh he also argued for admission of Prabha’s death, acceptance of KP as leader and re-structuring of LTTE and revision of strategy.

Ram also distributed a letter in his own handwriting in support of KP where he stated that former political commissar Nadesan had informed him in the latter stages that Prabhakaran wanted KP to take over as his successor.

SINNA RANJITH

Discussions between Nediyan and KP continued for weeks. Nediyan’s chief negotiator was “Sinna Ranjith” who had worked as an aide cum secretary for former tiger political adviser and strategist Anton Balasingham.

He was called “Sinna” or small to differentiate him from the Ranjith who headed the pro-LTTE radio “International Broadcasting Corporation” in London. Sinna Ranjith had earlier worked for the IBC. As Nediyan’s chief negotiator Ranjith called himself “Maran”.

There was much wrangling and both sides refused to compromise. At one stage the intelligence division personnel had lost patience with Nediyan-Sinna Ranjith stonewalling and declared the talks off.

Pledging full support they asked KP to go ahead on his own without Nediyan and cohorts but KP was adamant that unity had to be achieved.

AGREEMENT

Finally an agreement was arrived at. Nediyan was willing to accept KP’s leadership. Agreement was reached to re-structure the LTTE also.

According to the agreement the overseas LTTE would be re-structured as a single organization with different departments or secretariats (seyalahangal). KP would be “Thalamai Seyalar” (Chief Secretary or Secretary-General) and be in overall charge.

There would be various secretariats in charge of specific functions like human rights, resettlement, rehabilitation, reconstruction, peacebuilding, development, negotiations, political action, policymaking, public relations, media relations, resource management etc.

Sivaparan alias Nediyan would be in charge of the Dept of Diaspora Affairs.

Thus Nediyan would be responsible for the day to day administration of the various LTTE branches and institutions of the Tamil Diaspora. While this gives him functional authority and autonomy Nediyan and Diaspora branches have to accept KP as the overall LTTE leader and acknowledge him as their head.

There would also be an executive committee of the LTTE to oversee various aspects of the organization. The two co-chairs of this executive committee would be “Col” Suresh and “Col” Ram.K P would convene the executive committee meetings when necessary.

The question of paying homage to the LTTE leader and senior commanders was put off for November. Great Heroes week from Nov 21-27th, Great Heroes Day on Nov 27th and Prabhakaran’s Birthday on Nov 26th would be observed on a grand scale. KP wants the Diaspora and supportive elements in Tamil Nadu to commemorate Prabhakaran and other leaders on a grand scale.

Out of respect to Prabhakaran, KP himself refused to designate himself as leader. Instead he opted for “thalaimai Seyalar” saying that the one and only “Thalaiver” can only be Prabhakaran. This to some extent resembled CN Annadurai when he broke away from the Dravida Kazhaghham (DK) in 1949 and formed the Dravida Munnetra Kazhaghham (DMK).

Annadurai said that his one and only leader was DK chief EV Ramasamy Naikkar known as “Periyaar”. There would be no President for the DMK until and unless Periyaar himself filled. Annadurai functioned as “Amaippu Seyalaalar” or Organizational secretary. However Annadurai’s successor Karunanidhi amended the DMK constitution in 1969 and became president.

CABAL

Intra-LTTE agreement was reached on July 20th and a statement was released on July 21st. Ram and Suresh signed the release on behalf of the LTTE’s executive committee. The statement did not reveal too many details but it was implicit that KP was the new head and that unity was established. A re-structured LTTE heading in a new direction was on the cards.

But then things do not seem hunky-dory. Even the best laid plans of men and mice go awry.

While Nediyan has seemingly agreed to new arrangement and accepted KP’s leadership the anti-KP cabal remains defiant.

The manner in which the “Tamilnet” and “Pathivu” websites carried the press release issued by Ram and Suresh as well as the conspicuous silence of other tiger media organs suggest that the cabal is not ready to compromise.

The anti-KP cabal consists of several prominent tiger activists. The most important person is none other than Jaffna district MP from the Tamil National Alliance, Selvarajah Gajendran alias “kuthirai Gajen”.

Gajendran who got the most amount of preferences in Jaffna at the engineered election of 2004 is now in Oslo and is the pivotal force within the anti-KP cabal.

Among others are the Editor and Managing Editor of “Tamilnet” Namely Jeyachandran and Sreeharan. The former is in Norway and the latter in the USA.

Apart from the “Tamilnet” the Tamil websites “Sangathi” and “Pathivu” are also opposed to KP. “Sangathi” is controlled by Aathithan in France who also runs the Paris based “Eelamurasu” newspaper. “Pathivu” is run by Vaageesan who also heads the LTTE in Germany.

The Tamil freelance journalists Navaneedhan alias Ithayachandran and Paraneetharan alias Krishnarajani are also in this cabal. They write for a number of Tamil journals and websites.

The executive director of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) KP Regi is also against KP. Associated with KP Regi is “Root Ravi” one time head of the LTTE’s economic development organization TEEDOR. Both are in London.

CHALLENGE

Another anti-KP activist in London is “Paamban Ajith” who was at one time the chief bodyguard of Prabhakaran. Ajith who came to London in 1989 along with Krishnakumar alias Kittu is married to the sister-in-law of former LTTE stalwart Sornalingam alias Shankar. Ajith has extensive contacts with Tamil Nadu politicians and is responsible for the anti-KP sentiments in those circles.

Then there is Anbuchelvan who heads the world-wide youth outfit known as Tamil Youth Organization or TYO. The TYO has tentacles all over the Diaspora youth population and played a big role in organizing recent demonstrations.

This then is the situation. Despite the agreement reached between KP and Nediyan to re-structure the LTTE under the former’s leadership the cabal surrounding the latter is still in a rebellious mindset. Even the bona fides of Nediyan is suspect.

With influential sections of the tiger media, LTTE branches and youth organizations working against him, the new head of the faces an arduous task. It remains to be seen as to how KP surmounts this challenge.

P.S.

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