

War Clouds Over Sri Lanka: An Analysis of Prabhakaran and Pottu Amman's Heroes' Day Speeches

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For the first time the LTTE's Peace Secretariat published in their official website on 25 November 2005, their Intelligence Chief Pottu Amman's speech delivered at Elephant Pass while paying homage to LTTE martyrs. Among others, their Sea Tiger Chief Soosai also addressed the gathering. This was two days before the LTTE's annual Martyrs' Day, when their chief, Velupillai Prabhakaran made his "policy" statement for the year - an event that is keenly watched by the Sri Lankan security establishment and others who have an abiding interest in peace and stability in this region. There is a need to examine both these addresses taking into account the history of this ruthlessly violent group, by the security establishment of both Sri Lanka and India.

The Martyrs Day celebrations are now held over three days by the LTTE. Prabhakaran gave his address, as usual, on 27 November. The LTTE's own TV station, Nitharsanam, which is on air for about an hour and a half now, and is reported to be available in Europe, would have shown the address of their Chief live. The strategic implications of the two speeches, one of Prabhakaran and the other of his Intelligence Chief, need to be carefully examined and analyzed. The significance of the tone, tenor and content of the two speeches cannot be fully grasped if one does not consider some of the statements and views of the LTTE and its leaders.

Tamilnet, a pro LTTE website, carried the translated version of Prabhakaran's speech, where he has made references to history and mindset of Sinhalese people. According to the Prabhakaran, "The Sinhala nation continues to be entrapped in the Mahavamsa mindset, in that mythical ideology. The Sinhalese people are still

caught up in the legendary fiction that the island of Sri Lanka is a divine gift to Therevada Buddhism, a holy land entitled to the Sinhala race. The Sinhala nation has not redeemed itself from this mythological idea that is buried deep, and has become fossilized in their collective unconscious. It is because of this ideological blindness the Sinhalese people and their political and religious leaders are unable to grasp the authentic history of the island, and the social realities prevailing here. They are unable to comprehend and accept the very existence of a historically constituted nation of Tamil people living in their traditional home land in north-eastern Sri Lanka, entitled to fundamental political rights and freedoms." It is essential to compare the November 2005 speech of Prabhakaran with its views on the history of this island nation. One of their pamphlet - "Liberation Tigers and Tamil Eelam Freedom Struggle," published almost two decades ago, stated "Ceylon is the traditional homeland of two nations - Tamil Eelam, and Sri Lanka, the distinct formations, with two distinct cultures and languages, having their historical past." Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse, on 25 November also made his first policy statement after his election; he rejected the long-standing Tiger demand for recognition of a traditional homeland for the minority Tamils. He is also reported to have said that the peace process between the previous government and Tamil Tigers did not make progress because other stake holders were excluded. Other stake holders would also mean Tamil representatives of other streams, like EPDP, currently aligned with the government, and LTTE baiters like the JVP and others. Prabhakaran's Martyrs' Day address needs to be examined in the background of President Rajapakse's policy statement, and the LTTE's violent history.

Significantly, on 25 November, the day Rajapakse made his policy statement, the LTTE's Intelligence Chief, the dreaded Pottu Amman, co-accused with Prabhakaran in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, addressed a "homage" ceremony at Elephant Pass, the strategic entry point to Jaffna. In his speech, he stated: "Tamil people, having dissociated themselves from the political choice of Sri Lankan nationalism, have unequivocally demonstrated their trust in their own leadership." Pottu Amman was obviously referring to the Sri Lankan Presidential elections in which Tamils living in areas controlled by the LTTE had reportedly not taken part. It is besides the point that the Tigers had taken extraordinary precautions to ensure that people living within areas under their control did not step out of their limits, not that many would have dared to do it, familiar as they are with the LTTE's methods of retribution - which is almost always swift and brutal. At the Elephant Pass function, over 3,500 photographs of the LTTE's "martyrs", or Maveerar, as they call them, were exhibited.

Pottu Amman also recalled the unsuccessful attempt made by the LTTE in 1991 to take the Elephant pass, in which they lost over 600 of their cadres and said that that sacrifice was full of meaning today-as they had learned from past mistakes, and later succeeded in wresting Elephant Pass from the Sri Lankan armed forces. During the investigation of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the SIT learned that the Indian youngster, Ravichandran, an accused in the case, had joined the LTTE and had become a trusted lieutenant of Pottu Amman. He visited Pottu Amman immediately after the unsuccessful 1991 attempt of the LTTE to take Elephant Pass. Pottu Amman told Ravi that they have not yet developed into a proper conventional force. He

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had also decried the lack of support for the LTTE from Indian Tamils. At that point of time, Pottu Amman encouraged Ravi to get boys from Tamil Nadu in South India to the LTTE's hideouts for training to fight the Indian government, the objective was to wrest Tamil Nadu from the Indian union.

Ravi took a number of Indian Tamil boys to Jaffna for training and set up under Pottu Amman's close supervision, the Tamil National Retrieval Troops. It is a different matter that in the action following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, the Tamil Nadu Police succeeded in arresting Ravi and his associates, putting a halt to Pottu Amman's and Prabhakaran's plans. While praising the sacrifice of their cadres in his address this year, Pottu Amman also said that to enrich the meaning of the sacrifice of Maveerar, it is essential that Tamil people get their freedom and that " if we lose strength, our history will be written by our enemies.....the sacrifice of Maveerar will lose its worth."

Pottu Amman also referred to the IPKF's operations in Sri Lanka in terms of the India Sri Lanka Accord. Recalling IPKF operations and the challenges the LTTE faced, Pottu Amman said that they have reached this stage "because we survived the Indian military assault." He goes on to add "...The LTTE military stands behind our leader..... Tamil nation in unison has taught a good lesson to the Sinhala nation by saying to it to elect its own head. This is the strength of the Tamil nation. This will come together as military strength, economic strength and political strength. Then the dream of our Maveerar will become a reality..... Let us stand behind our leader to strengthen Tamil nation to work for that dream."

Sivarasan, the one eyed jack who was cornered by the SIT along with six more LTTE cadres in the Bangalore hideout had left a poem on their favourite theme of liberating Tamil Eelam, of strengthening the hands of the leader, Prabhakaran, holding the Tiger flag aloft and exhorting all Tamils to wake-up, unite and finish off the enemy. It is this dream of Sivarasan, a Maveerar for the LTTE though they will certainly not claim him as one at least for now, that Pottu Amman, Sivarasan's boss referred to in his address on 25 November this year.

Prabhakaran has said that they "do not believe

that we can gain a reasonable solution from the Sinhala nation. We have to fight and win our rights. We have never entertained the idea that we could obtain justice from the compassion of the Sinhala politicians. This has always been the view of our liberation organization". Pottu Amman's faithful deputy, the one eyed Sivarasan who masterminded Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, echoed similar sentiments while addressing a gathering at Uddippidy, on 26 September 1989, the second anniversary of the death by fasting of Dileepan, a senior LTTE cadre, when the IPKF was on the last leg of their operation in Jaffna. We had seized a video cassette from LTTE supporters which had Sivarasan's address which was marked as evidence in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination trial. In his address this year, Prabhakaran has referred to the IPKF operation, "when we encountered a serious threat to our freedom struggle and to the interests of our people, our liberation organization was bold enough to oppose the Indian superpower and fight its military machine."

The entire peace process, according to Prabhakaran, was a peace trap to undermine their liberation struggle, and taking advantage of this process, a "strange low intensity war" has been unleashed against them. Citing the cold response of the government to the LTTE's proposal for a Self Governing Authority in the Tamil homeland Prabhakaran said, "it is a day dream to expect to secure a regional self governing authority in the Tamil homeland by negotiating with the Sinhala political leadership. This is the political truth we have been able to learn from the four year period of the peace process. We hope that the international community, which has been intensely observing this political drama, similarly understands this truth." He goes on to add "Our people can no longer tolerate an unstable life and an uncertain future..... We have now reached a significant historic turning point in our struggle for self determination..... Our people have, therefore, realized that they have no alternative other than to fight and win their right to self determination". This is as clear a line as can be, that the Tigers have given notice of their future strategy.

Pottu Amman's address should be seen in this light. He has remained one of the most fiercely loyal soldiers of Prabhakaran. The mastermind in several major operations, including the attack on the Sri

Lankan air base in June 2001, he has ruthlessly mowed down all resistance from within to the Thalaivar (Prabhakaran) - and that includes the elimination of Prabhakaran's one time deputy, Mahatiya Mahendraraja on the ground that he was a R&AW agent.

If one looks into the history of LTTE, the pattern would be visible. In an interview to Time magazine in April 1990, Prabhakaran mentioned that **h o w s o e v e r** formidable the opposition, what matters is whether one has the will to stand up and fight. The same theme was stressed in the video of LTTE leaders, including Prabhakaran, Pottu Amman and the Sea Tigers' chief Susai addressing LTTE cadres before they attacked and destroyed the Sri Lankan army base at Pooneryn in November 1993.

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While many pundits have argued that that the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi was a blunder committed by the LTTE, Prabhakaran does not appear to either subscribe to this view, or expressed any regret for this 'mistake'. The LTTE has recently invited "Tamil bards and minstrels with patriotic fervor" to compose a Tamil Eelam national anthem. They have also released guidelines for proper use of the Tamil Eelam National flag. Reports are now coming of sporadic attacks on Sri Lankan forces by Tiger guerillas, stretching the limits of the cease fire. The situation is more or less like during the days preceding the LTTE-IPKF war when the LTTE attacked and killed nearly hundred cadres belonging to rival Tamil groups like TELO, EPRLF and PLOTE, which resulted in the Sri Lankan government asking the Indians to take action against the LTTE. Similarly, after the withdrawal of the IPKF and just before LTTE's Eelam War II that began in June 1990, they abducted and killed scores of Sri Lankan policemen. In the first three weeks of December alone this year, forty-five Sri Lankan security forces personnel have

been killed in suspected LTTE action.

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