

The Murder of Sabalingam

What has actually perplexed many is, why has someone taken all this trouble and utter risk to kill poor Sabalingam when so many like Kruschev have taken it upon themselves to lambast the LTTE in every possible way that has remained hale and hearty unto this day?

The four-assassination of Sabalingam at No. 3 Allee Paul Leautaud, Sagrelles, a quiet middle class neighbourhood in Paris on May day is the first Tamil political murder in the west. And as such it has deeply perturbed the Tamil expatriate community in Europe and Canada. It has also no doubt added to the worries of many Tamils in Europe who are faced with the threat of forced and imminent repatriation, and who have always felt despite the occasional uprightness on the part of newly arrived youth — that the best way to make their stay in those climes permanent and profitable was to impress upon their host governments that they were a hardworking and peaceful lot.

But with the dastardly murder of Sabalingam it is only too clear that the bloody business of Eelam politics will permit them no peace of mind even in those distant climes where they have sought refuge. The Sabalingam I knew was a peaceful man. He helped refugees with their paper work, was an avid collector of books on Sri Lanka, and did

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vented me from obliging him. I heard later that he had set out to do it on his own. And now I find that his investigations into some of the dangerous recesses of the Eelam movement's early history has cost him his life. For Tamil politics to be their sole property, the Tigers know, the history of the Tamil liberation movement has also got to be impossibly, belong only to them. Sabalingam was the only political contemporary of Prabhakaran who ever attempted to put pen to paper. And he is dead.

The LTTE in Paris seems to have denied involvement in the killing according to one source in France. A pamphlet has been put out in Berlin condemning the murder and implying the LTTE's involvement in it. The anti LTTE and non LTTE sections of the Tamil expatriate community which have been in general retreat since President Wijetunga started harping on his refrain that there is no ethnic problem have now been stirred into action.

One influential group in London, I understand, has already begun preparing a memorandum calling on European governments to crack down on the LTTE, accusing the organisation of perpetrating the murder. The main reason for this backlash is that Sabalingam was one of the few expatriates in Europe who maintained a very wide network connections with writers, intellectuals, social workers

and journalists in Europe, Sri Lanka Tamil Nadu and North America, and in their eyes Sabalingam was an honest and earnest man who frequently got into debt in order to carry on with his work.

His associates in France attribute the murder to the Tigers for the following reason: He had written an article to 'Thayagam', a Tamil political weekly magazine published in Canada in which he questioned, among other matters, two incidents in the early phase of the Eelam movement in which Prabhakaran was involved. One was the arrest of Kuttimani and Thangathurai, and the other was the Neervely Bank robbery which



Prabhakaran with a few of his trusted lieutenants

member who joins another organisation should be punished with death. He had killed some of his contemporaries precisely on that ground. And here we have Sabalingam saying that he was gathering evidence on such matters to write a comprehensive book! But before we proceed any further a word about Thayagam. It is by far the most consistently fierce anti LTTE publication that has ever come out during the course of the two Eelam wars. (The army's psy-ops pundits (?) would look worse than kindergarten kids if any one were to judge their work by standards set by Thayagam in its verbal blitzkriegs on the LTTE.) It was published as a tabloid in Toronto for a couple of years and was forced to become a magazine in 1992 when the Tigers threatened many Tamil shops which were selling it and successfully crippled its circulation in favour of the rival Tamil tabloid Senthamarai. 'Thayagam' is

movement was formed in reaction to the standardisation of university admissions under the SLFP regime at that time. It was the first Tamil youth group to advocate an armed insurrection no doubt inspired by the example of Rohana Wijeweera.

Prabhakaran joined one of Sathyaseelan's underground cells as an 18-year-old boy in 1972. Sathyaseelan, Poopathy, Sabalingam who was an engineering student at Kattubedde at that time and several others were arrested in March '73 by the police. The movement was almost busted at this juncture but Prabhakaran survived. While Sabalingam was jailed in the Anuradhapura New Prison, Chetti Thanabalasingam — with whom Prabhakaran started the Tamil New Tigers — Kennedy Pathan and Rathnakumar who were also serving terms in the same prison made good their escape in a jail break. As a result of which Sabalingam and others were transferred to the Bogambara prison. And one day during his stay there he fell from the prison's second floor — an accident which permanently affected his left hand.

He was released from prison in February 1975. Later he got a job at the Paranthan saltans, and like many others slowly faded away from the scene despite a connection he had with the Eela Viduthalaikyakkam which was started in '76 and in which Varatharaja Perumal was a prominent activist. Another member of this group was Pushparajah who like Perumal later joined the EPRLF and

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and short Bala (a founding member of the LTTE who saved Prabhakaran from arrest at Inuvil) live in Germany. Iyar a Jaffna Brahmin, who was the treasurer of the original LTTE is also living quietly somewhere in Europe. Raghavan who was almost Praba's equal in the organization until he fell out with him in 1985 lives in London with Nirmala Nthyianandian (the killing of Nirmala's sister Rignari is attributed by some to Raghavan's connection) But all have kept utterly quiet to this day.

Sabalingam was making arrangements to meet them one by one to gather the bits and pieces of the past with which he hoped to narrate another history.

It is ironic indeed that Sabalingam lived in a country where many decades ago the great Russian emigre Alexander Kojeve delivered his famous lectures on Hegel which "dramatically shaped the French intellectual landscape of this century" and the essence of which was "history will be long, and shall be according, to those who have won with the force of arms" (Vincent Descombes calls it the "terrorist interpretation" of Hegel). Though Fukuyama has commercialised Kojeve's ideas to entertain the flippant intellectual fancies of the American mind, they remind us with cold blooded clarity that for Prabhakaran who considers himself the ultimate victor in the Eelam movement, its history must be long to him, even if were to cost many lives. That is central to his existence.

by Taraki