

Prabhakaran hunts for more IPKF friends. (1994, November 20).
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By our Defence Correspondent

The death of Gamini Disanayake has been added to the long list of public figures killed on both sides of the Palk Straits.

The politics of Sri Lanka and to a lesser extent of India is being controlled by Velupillai Prabhakaran, who has developed the capacity to eliminate those whom he wants to kill.

The list — T. Sabaratnam, A. Amirthalingam, Ranjan Wijeratne, K. Padmanabaha, Rajiv Gandhi, Lalith Athulathmudali, R. Premadasa, Gamini Disanayake — is becoming longer and prominent.

Instead of engaging in passive defence, (i.e. developing structures to protect himself before the Sri Lankan and the Indian security forces), Prabhakaran is engaging in active defence.

Prabhakaran has debunked the theory that "one should not fight on two fronts." No guerrilla leader anywhere in the world can claim what Prabhakaran has done. He has eliminated two heads of Government — Gandhi and Premadasa. He has also eliminated three potential Presidents — Wijeratne, Athulathmudali and Disanayake — the cream of Sri Lankan political leaders.

Whether we like it or not, Prabhakaran, who is stronger than ever, will continue to play the game of weeding out his opponents and those who pose a threat to him and to his rebel army.

Had the Sri Lanka police and the armed forces developed their counter insurgency capability, the political leaders of today would not have had to cover up for the assassination of political leaders, the bombings in public places and the massacres of civilians. If the LTTE could have been militarily destroyed, the politicians would not have to go begging "let's talk, let's negotiate, let's resume the peace process."

The LTTE is aware that the politicians of the south are begging for peace because the LTTE

cannot be destroyed militarily — the LTTE will have no love for the peace process because it knows that entering politics will lead to marginalisation and isolation.

Even after the military came to the conclusion that the LTTE cannot be fought by conventional means, the army has not made a major policy decision to change its curricula from conventional to unconventional warfare. Adaptation, which is the key word when confronted with a guerrilla insurgency, has not received its due importance. The quality of leadership of the army has steadily deteriorated — money and power, not the country and the people, has become the criteria.

When a senior military officer was asked in the early 1980s about the looming threat from Jaffna, he responded, "Oh, not to worry, these are sarong clad young boys. We are West Point and Sandhurst trained officers!"

One of the major mistakes made by the successive political leaders was to keep weak military officers at the top. Some political leaders believed that it was better to have a weak man at the top as this would reduce the risk of a coup. The defence bureaucracy was entrusted to such mediocre men. They never prepared for what was going to happen, but only reacted to events.

At least at this late stage the defence bureaucracy must be brought under civilian control. This will enable defence policy makers to integrate economic and political components into the war strategy, which is imperative to fight the LTTE insurgency. Today, when the government talks with the LTTE, the defence apparatus will again go into hibernation and will awake surprised and at great cost like in July 1990. The LTTE plan is clear. Firstly it will not surrender its weapons. It is also unreasonable for the government to ask the LTTE to surrender its weapons. What has the government done

to rectify the grievances of the Tamils? What political autonomy has been devolved on the ground.

Secondly, the LTTE will not withdraw from the territory controlled by it unless that territory is forcibly recovered. But, even if territory is captured, like in the past, the government has no effective political and economic plans to develop the recovered areas. Because of these two features, the agenda for negotiation should not be to recover weapons or withdraw from a territory.

The agenda for negotiation according to the LTTE will be a power sharing agreement within the unitary constitution between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils.

The government of President Kumaratunga will realise the difficulties of cooperating with the LTTE in such an arrangement. Further, President Kumaratunga will be unable to go ahead with such a plan, if presidential powers are vested in parliament and she reverts to the position of a Premier. These are the hard realities of negotiating with the LTTE.

The government of India has expressed its unhappiness over the attempts by President Kumaratunga to talk to the LTTE. New Delhi, has privately expressed its displeasure of having the LTTE as a legitimate political group in north-eastern Sri Lanka primarily because of the precarious position of Tamil Nadu security.

It is likely that the LTTE will equally direct its energies in the coming year to bring to power a regime more favourable to the LTTE in Tamil Nadu. Without exploiting the sentiment of Tamil nationalism across the Palk Straits, and inviting repression on this side, it will be nearly impossible to generate the right degree of Indian Tamil and the Sri Lankan Tamil support to create an independent Tamil Eelam.

It is assessed by Indian security agencies that the LTTE has planned to assassinate Jayalalitha and Karunanidhi. The desire

of the LTTE is to bring V. Gopalasamy, a close ally of Prabhakaran, to office.

The LTTE threat towards the north is equally alarming as the threat to the south. According to the latest information, Mr. Disanayake had spoke of a plot by the LTTE to kill not only him but also J. N. Dixit. Based on information through an individual contact in the LTTE, Disanayake revealed that the LTTE was planning not only to kill him but also several of his Indian colleagues involved in plan to reinduct the Indian troops.

It may be recalled that Dixit was high on the LTTE hit list during his last year as the Indian High Commissioner in Colombo. Even after his departure from Colombo, when he was foreign secretary in New Delhi, his name was on the LTTE hit list for his role in inducting the Indian Forces and "staging" the bloody IPKF — LTTE war.

Other than the Special Investigations Team Chief D.R. Karthikeyan and his men who are associated with the on-going Gandhi murder trial, it is only Dixit and General Krishnaswamy Sunderji, who are provided Indian security even at their retirements, for their past role in confronting the Tiger movement.

Dixit is believed to be one of the few people to have understood the psyche of the LTTE and to have seen through Prabhakaran. In a number of public addresses he continues to make in India, before diplomats, service personnel, intelligence fora, Dixit has advocated death to Prabhakaran for the murder of Gandhi.

Indian intelligence had assessed that Prabhakaran's anger against Dixit is personal. According to a remark made by Anton Balasingham, it is no different to the anger which Prabhakaran had for Rajiv Gandhi for "humiliating" him in New Delhi. In many ways, this anger is something very similar to the anger which Prabhakaran had for Ranjan Wijeratne.