

The Black Tiger phenomena – its origin and their targets

THE ISLAND
14.11.93

The ultra-secret camp of the LTTE in Nallur is exclusively for training the elite Black Tigers — the highly motivated and highly trained youth who undertake suicide missions on behalf of the LTTE. Using a man to die for a cause while damaging the enemy in a major way was conceptualized by Velupillai Prabhakaran, the Chairman and military Commander of the LTTE when an Arab terrorist drove a truck laden with explosives wiping out a US marine contingent in Beirut, Lebanon in 1984. Velupillai Prabhakaran, who was sensitive to the latest developments in the art of warfare immediately grasped the importance of this single act and improvised it to suit his designs.

In May 1987, when LTTE was under pressure from the advancing Sri Lankan armed forces into Jaffna — the heartland of the Tamils — he personally planned the first suicide attack on a newly established army detachment. His Jaffna Commander Sathasivam Krishnakumar alias Kittu had suffered a leg injury as a result of a grenade thrown by a Jaffna Tamil who was on the payroll of a Sri Lankan army officer. Prabhakaran's new Jaffna commander Radha, the LTTE leader who led the assault on Anuradhapura killing over 200 nuns, pilgrims and bystanders, was sniped and killed early that month while conducting a reconnaissance

of the advancing Sri Lankan troops of Operation Liberation. Prabhakaran decided on a two pronged strategy — to request for assistance from India, which New Delhi generously provided by way of weaponry and anti-aircraft weapon training including the use of SAM 7 missiles. The second strategy was to perform a suicide mission.

Prabhakaran believed that killing a person does not end one's life. As a young fighter, he always had a unique approach. He prayed and appealed to the Hindu pantheon of gods for his success before he killed. In fact many other LTTE leaders emulated this — before the LTTE attacked the Police Station in Jaffna adjoining the Fort, the LTTE assault team and their leader prayed at the Nallur Kandasamy Kovil. Prabhakaran believed that a person's soul will continue to exist after death. This is why he said recently when addressing a gathering: "If we do not achieve Eelam, the souls of the martyrs will haunt us." The power behind the Black Tiger phenomena was the motivation and the training — breaking one's self-identity, rigorous training, building one's self-importance, sending him or her on a mission of vital importance for the cause.

Prabhakaran had declared with the formal introduction of the cyanide capsule in 1982 that to terminate one's life voluntarily

to liberate his motherland is the highest and the noblest achievement. This was the ideological force behind the first Black Tiger Vasanthan who was born in Thunnalal in 1966. Vasanthan, a Hartley College, Point Pedro student was a keen sportsman. He joined the LTTE in 1984 and was given the group name Miller. On June 5, 1987, Miller drove a truck full of explosives into the Nelliapaddy Central College killing, according to the LTTE over 100 soldiers, who had encamped and were planning to advance further.

First hero

Miller, the first Black Tiger, was posthumously given the LTTE rank of Captain. His mother was sad, but thereafter she reconciled and to this date speaks of her son as the first hero of Tamil Eelam. Speaking to the Dutch radio VPRO and the BBC, she repeated what the LTTE wanted her to say: "My son died for Eelam — we are proud of him." Prabhakaran, a master at politico-military warfare used the opportunity to motivate his cadres further. It was the success of the first attack which led him to start a small camp to train Black Tigers. The initial response was encouraging. Whenever his intelligence men circulated a list among the regular LTTE camps for volunteers for Black Tiger training, the

response was overwhelming. The LTTE had to have a lottery to pick the ones who were going to die for Eelam. After the basic Black Tiger training in Jaffna and in the Wanari, the best were retained and the others were inducted back to their original camps. Dependent on the mission the selected were given highly secretive specialized training for daring missions or to guard the LTTE leadership and their families. Entrusting highly trained and motivated men for the personal security of leaders exposed the LTTE to some degree of criticism, similar to some cases in the south where politicians and their families use resources which can be used for better purposes.

Highly selective

The propaganda wing of the LTTE was generous in displaying Miller's photograph as well as his posters at every junction in the peninsula. The LTTE projected the Black Tiger missions as the triumph card of their movement and the epitome of their motivation. Youth from families killed by shelling, firing, artillery and bombing were easy and confirmed recruits for the Black Tigers. Yet, Prabhakaran was highly selective in his choice, the hallmark and success of the LTTE over the other groups from its inception.

However more recently this has changed, perhaps due to the pressures of war. Many weakly motivated LTTE cadres who had been dispatched on suicide missions have been arrested and executed by law enforcement officers even without the knowledge of their superiors. This has been to prevent those arrested from being sent to an ordinary prison where a person can communicate to others and also expect freedom either by escaping or through a loophole in law. This strategy has been adopted by young officers because the Sri Lankan legal system is

by Ravana

still archaic and does not support the type of warfare the State is fighting. This is a serious matter for debate and study by the Justice Minister Harold Herath and the Constitutional Affairs State Minister Kaise Choksy.

After the IPKF was inducted about two months later Prabhakaran's idea of Black Tiger operations did not die. He saw the importance of it only after the IPKF-LTTE war erupted. He saw the Black Tiger operations as an extension of the determination of an average LTTE cadre. However, the Black Tiger operations were limited against the Indian military resources were vast and would

have the same effect it would have on a small army like the Sri Lankan army. But the LTTE cadres fought with the same determination and drive against the mighty Indian forces and towards the latter stages survived with the assistance of the Sri Lankan side.

Determination

Eelam War II witnessed the largest number of Black Tiger operations. Those who had the same degree of determination were motivated further, provided specialized training to perform, Black Tiger operations. This

genie leader for international operations and Bosco, the intelligence leader for Colombo. Among the LTTE leaders who has access to the camp are Prabhakaran, who personally motivates them, his military deputy Balraj, the Sea Commander Soosal and the military operations adviser V. Shankar. Even Mahataya, the former deputy of Prabhakaran who is now under house arrest, Yogi, the political secretary of the now defunct Popular Front of Liberation Tigers (PFLT) who is now confined only to writing a magazine and Anton Balasingham, the political advisor who has been replaced by Tamil Chelevam has no access to this camp. This also demonstrates that Prabhakaran's trust has been placed in a new set of leaders and his former leaders are gradually falling out with him.

Since the first Black Tiger mission in Nelliapady, Sri Lanka has witnessed a number of attacks. On November 11, 1990, Arsarathnam from Chennamadu known as Lt. Col Borg led the final assault on the army camp at Mankulam. Even though the LTTE claims that over 110 were killed as a result of his action, by the time Borg's vehicle reached the camp, almost all of the soldiers had broken out of the camp and retreated. Only the dead and the wounded were there to be burnt by the explosion created by Borg Arsarathnam joined the LTTE in

1983 and was LTTE's Mulativu and later Vavuniya Commander. He took part in the Kokuvil assault on the Sri Lanka army camp, which the LTTE overran. His dedication was spotted by a local commander. Thereafter, he was posted to Jaffna where he volunteered to join the elite Black Tigers.

Thayaparan of Mulankavil known as Major Dampo led the Black Tiger assault on March 19, 1991. LTTE failed in capturing the Silavathurai army camp due to professionalism on the part of a young Sri Lankan officer who directed the counter offensive. Dampo joined the LTTE in 1986 and served in Mannar during which period he was evaluated and chosen for specialized Black Tiger training. Sea Black Tiger Major Kantharuban, Captain Collins and Captain Vinoth attacked a Navy ship sinking it on July 11, 1990.

First sea Tiger attack

This was the first Sea Tiger attack the LTTE performed on the Sri Lankan navy and was a consequence of the Navy being not alert despite repeated warnings on the capabilities of the Sea Tigers, from the Ministry of Defence. Kantharuban, born on October 9, 1970, was born in Velvetithurai. Collins born on December 5, 1969, was from Mannar

and Vinoth, born on August 19, 1970 was from Velvetithurai.

The average age of the Black Tiger has dropped to 18 and it is likely that in the near future this may drop further to 16 and 15. Sea Black Tiger Captains Jayanthan of Batticaloa and Chiddambaram of Velvetithurai attacked a naval vessel off the seas of Point Pedro on May 4, 1991. The vessel suffered minor damage but the two LTTE men died. These men as well as the LTTE cadres who took part in the suicide missions against the Dvora boat spent a day with Prabhakaran before the attack. Today, spending a day with their leader and posing for photographs has almost become a ritual.

Spectacular killing

Another spectacular killing was that of Clancy Fernando, the commander of the Sri Lanka Navy, who was warned by the security authorities less than a week before he was killed. The former Navy Commander was targeted as he was the architect of the lagoon operation which restricted LTTE dominance over the lagoon and the free access the LTTE enjoyed from north to east and vice versa. However, this operation has come under severe criticism because a number of civilians died as a result of naval action. Amidst allegations by the Navy that the LTTE con-

tinues to use the passengers as cover and attack at the navy, a senior member of the clergy from Jaffna who is now in Colombo is reported to have told the government leadership that the Navy has only fired warning shots at the civilians. The LTTE continues to do its best to keep the boats running across the lagoon. It is both a question of finance and prestige for them and is bound to maintain the best boat service at heavy costs. It was only two months ago that Sri Lanka witnessed two other daring Black Tiger attacks. Captain Madan and Major Nilavan, aged 15 and 17, attacked a motor boat yet of the Sri Lanka Navy in the lagoon and Major Puhalsan and Captain Maniarsan, aged 16 and 14, attacked a naval craft again in the lagoon. Commenting on this recent Black Sea Tiger attack which included a cripple, an LTTE instructor now in custody said that it is easier to motivate a physically and a mentally deficient person to commit an act of suicide. He added that the LTTE makes full use of such situations.

The dramatic slaying of Rajiv Gandhi and R. Premadasa by a female Black Tiger and a male Black Tiger which shocked the entire world are well known. However much the LTTE has denied this, the Indian and the Sri Lankan investigators have managed to

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