

The LTTE strategy versus the State's strategy. (1993, December 05). The Island.

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On November 26th Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader and the Military Commander of the LTTE celebrated his 39th birthday. According to eastern astrology, this will be his last year in power. But, the statement he issued to commemorate the great hero's day on the midnight of November 26th, reflected his iron determination to create a separate country for the Tamils.

Prabhakaran said, "I never believed that there could be a change in the extremist attitude of Sinhala chauvinism. The Tamils will never receive justice until there is a change. The strong attitude of the Sinhala chauvinist has kept open the only path of a separate state for the people of Tamil Eelam, we have no alternative but to traverse on this path. Our liberation organisation continues its dedicated journey on this path. This path is most difficult — full of stones and thorns, full of animals and poisonous creepers, but we continue our journey on this very same path, the great heroes who went ahead guiding us. They cleared the path by removing the stones and thorns, they killed the animals and poisonous creepers, they illuminated the path. We would continue our illustrious journey on the path of freedom, which is seen very clearly by the beacon lights lit by our great heroes".

In Prabhakaran's statement, there are three

facets which should be examined.

Firstly, that he believed that the State always promoted Sinhala chauvinism. The Government of Sri Lanka should take note of Prabhakaran's card. Prabhakaran is generating support for his war machinery by playing the card of Tamil nationalism. The question arises — is Tamil nationalism a consequence of Sinhala chauvinism or an inherent phenomena? Should not the majority community be more generous to the minority community, particularly at this hour without playing into the hands of Prabhakaran? Political leaders of this country has been, as the international affairs advisor to the President Bradman Weerakoon, poignantly said, "Either black or white — they do not see the shades — the grays, the browns and the others." Should not the government try their best to win over the Tamils and work with the Tamil parties and militant groups victimized by the LTTE?

Secondly, the iron will of Prabhakaran — the extraordinary ability to deploy all resources to engage the enemy, is clearly seen. Should not the government think seriously of fighting the LTTE on all the fronts it is fighting the State? While the LTTE is engaging the State militarily, politically, economically and internationally, the State is engaging the LTTE only militarily. This is primarily because there is neither orchestration nor an effort to en-

gage the LTTE on each of these fronts. Who should be held responsible? The political leadership must insist from the bureaucracy to develop two distinct but inter-related programs both of the East and for the North, and incorporate them into the northern and the eastern theatres. Politically the part which is lacking most, is the projection of successes in the East — the contrast between the Tamils living in the LTTE controlled areas and the Security Forces controlled areas. The contrast in infrastructure — roads, water supply, housing, education, health, etc.

Economically the government has no strategy at all. The recent statement of the Government Agent reflects that there is no shortage of food in the north. The LTTE has taken the credit for the availability of food — in a way the LTTE is giving a clear message to the people that if you live under us or under the State, there is no difference. Internationally, the LTTE has lost ground since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. To counter this, the LTTE has devised a unique strategy. Without generating mass propaganda they are more specific. They would now focus on certain non-governmental groups, from development organisations to human rights lobbyists, that could be easily won over to supporting them. The Sri Lankan missions overseas, except for a handful, are not doing their job.

Thirdly, Prabhakaran's statement reflects the ruthless manner in which he is mobilizing the youth to join the LTTE. In an address he gave a few months ago, he said, "If we deviate from the path of Eelam, the souls of our martyrs, will come and haunt us". Prabhakaran himself has admitted that over 6,000 LTTE youth have died, and over three that number of innocent Tamils have perished in this senseless war. The Ministry of Information under its able Minister Tyrone Fernando has failed in their mandate in convincing the Tamil people that they are dying for no gain. The LTTE has fought since 1974. Next year, Prabhakaran will complete 20 years of living in perpetual battle. How many Tamil leaflets have they printed in the past? Are they beaming a Tamil service to the north? What is the Director of Information doing except trying to correct the Defence correspondent of another newspaper? The message of the information moguls should give their people in the north is that even if the Government of Sri Lanka was to grant Eelam, that India will not allow it. Today the message the strategic community in New Delhi is giving is that if Eelam is achieved the extremist Tamils in Tamil Nadu State will use it as a launching pad to dismember Tamil Nadu. Further, there lies no doubt that the Indian forces will be active on Sri Lanka if the LTTE insurgency expands



beyond uncontrollable proportions. The Rajiv Gandhi murder trial has ended and the trial is expected to commence in January 1994. The outcome of the trial, the passing of a recent law in India giving a mandate for the Indian forces to operate beyond her territory, the pressure from prominent Indians in and out side office, are all indications of Indian presence in Sri Lanka.

There is a message in this for Prabhakaran too. He has fought this war hard, perhaps communally but selflessly. Like some of our politicians and bureaucrats, he has not made money on the sly or is not educating his

Government of Sri Lanka must get is that if they want to win over the insurgency in the north-east, more than persuading her armies to fight it, she must develop institutional and other mechanisms to engage the LTTE on all fronts. Firstly, they must have one door wide open. Secondly, it must give the control of the East to the STF and the police and develop and implement an effective pacification programme. Thirdly, it must pursue a politico-military approach which will force the LTTE to negotiate.

Last week three significant events took place in Jaffna, Colombo and in Vavuniya. In Jaffna, a group of University dons met under the auspices of the LTTE to formulate a comprehensive development program for the lagoon. This was a sequel to series of conferences TEDORE, the economic wing of the LTTE, is undertaking to develop the north-east, starting with the peninsula. This demonstrated, once again, the gaining of root, by the LTTE among a section of intellectuals, in Colombo, a consortium of NGOs, mostly European and largely funded by ANOVB of Norway, met and decided to recruit a high profile foreigner to campaign internationally against the Government of Sri Lanka's posture towards the LTTE. It is reported that the man to be recruited will be based in a Western capital and he will lobby aid organisations and donor countries

against supporting the Government of Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Policy Planning have turned a blind eye to this, either through ignorance or incompetence. In Vavuniya, a decision was made by PLOTE, to mobilize the support of Tamil youth and stage a demonstration against the government for not giving adequate places in University admissions to the Tamil student living in

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LTTE controlled areas. PLOTE which collects Rs. 200,000 a day from the checkpoint at Thandikulam, must get the message that they should spend their resources more effectively. It is for organisations like PLOTE to appeal to the Tamil people in the LTTE controlled areas that the level of education of the bright and hard working Tamils have dropped because their best teachers have left Jaffna and the conducive conditions for studying have declined by LTTE's intransigence. It is for organisations like PLOTE to set an example to other organisations to use their representatives domestically and abroad to peacefully demonstrate before LTTE organized meetings and conferences and counter LTTE propaganda.

Whether one likes it or not, history is taking its right course. The Government of Sri Lanka will

reap what it has sown. The Tamil politicians, the LTTE, the Sri Lankan armed forces, both the Sinhalese and the Tamil people are also reaping what they have sown. It is still not too late for all sides to make up for their follies. The bottom line is that the government is not taking advantage of the circumstances which is in their favour — from dwindling Tamil support for the LTTE to greater international support for

the government. In the history of warfare, there are many examples of insurgencies crushed. However, none of those insurgencies have been externally assisted. To date despite a naval blockade by the Sri Lankan and the Indian Navy nearly 30% of supplies for the LTTE reaches by sea and the other 70% by way of capture from the Sri Lankan forces. For the LTTE to obtain 70% of supplies from the Sri Lankan forces is a very difficult task. The sacrifices it has to make, particularly in terms of numbers is very heavy. The battles at the Pooneryn — Nagathevanthurai base complex and operation Yal Devi demonstrates first clearly. The fact that only 30% of the supplies reaches them externally is also a clear indication of LTTE's stand internationally. While the government of Sri Lanka has failed, the LTTE is gra-

dually coming to grips with the new realities of the post cold war era. But can Prabhakaran fight against the tide? In context Prabhakaran's statement is of interest. He said, "It is not that we do not know that this world does not rotate on the wheel of human ethics. Every country gives priority to the self interest of the nation. It is the economic-commercial interests which determines the world order today more than the rights of the people, human rights more than the ethnic moral. It is on this basis that everything happens, be it international politics or diplomatic relationships. On this basis we cannot expect the international community to immediately accept the moral righteousness of our struggle. We should continue to raise our voice for this acceptance. International conditions may turn favourable to us at some stage at which time the conscience of the world on the basis of reasoning will turn favourable to us".

The pertinent question here would be, "Is Prabhakaran waiting to see the disintegration of India? Will the Tamils continue to support him to the same degree that they are in the times ahead? If he won't deliver the goods soon or if he is not realistic enough, will his support base gradually wane away? Will Prabhakaran's campaign last the test of time?"

Next week:
LTTE's international image