

Sri Lankan government enlists services of former LTTE leader

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Further evidence has emerged in recent weeks of the continuing political disintegration of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which was militarily crushed in May 2009 by the Sri Lankan military. Several reports indicate that Selvarasa Pathmanathan, also known as KP, who took over as LTTE leader after the death of V. Prabhakaran, is now actively collaborating with the Sri Lankan government and military intelligence.

Pathmanathan was for many years the LTTE's main fundraiser and arms procurer. In the final stages of fighting last year, Prabhakaran appointed Pathmanathan as head of the LTTE's international division, where his main role as to issue a series of futile appeals to the US and other major powers to intervene to stop the fighting. The Sri Lankan army continued its bloody offensive killing tens of thousands of civilians, finally overrunning the last patch of LTTE-held territory and slaughtering its top leadership, including Prabhakaran.

Following the LTTE's defeat, Pathmanathan claimed the leadership and announced the establishment of a so-called Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) in exile. Visuvanathan Rudrakumaran, a Tamil lawyer residing in the US, was appointed by Pathmanathan as the coordinator. Bitter disagreements erupted between other pro-LTTE exile factions, including over control of the disintegrating organisation's assets. Looking for support from the major powers, Pathmanathan's group formally abandoned the armed struggle.

Pathmanathan's plans came to an abrupt end after he was arrested in Malaysia last August, handed over to Sri Lankan military intelligence and sent back to the island. According to articles in the Sri Lankan press in June, the former LTTE leader is now actively working with the government, providing information about the LTTE's international operations and encouraging his supporters to cooperate with Colombo.

Such reports need to be treated with caution. Pathmanathan is yet to make any public statement of his own. Sri Lankan military intelligence has decades of experience in manipulating

various Tamil groups and parties and playing them off against one another. It played a major role in 2004 in fomenting a debilitating breakaway by the LTTE's eastern wing. Top eastern commanders—V. Muralitharan, also known as Karuna, and Sivanesanthurai Chandrakanthan, or Pillayan, are now active political allies of the Colombo government. The military is also notorious for using duress and torture to achieve their ends.

However, if the press reports are correct, Pathmanathan has been a rather willing collaborator, eager to prove his value to his captors. In his *Daily Mirror* column on July 11, D.B.S. Jeyaraj noted that Pathmanathan had impressed Sri Lankan Defence Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse at their first meeting, which heralded what sources described as “the beginning of a beautiful friendship” between captor and captive. “KP began providing information about the assets and activities of the overseas tigers. The government was able to ‘acquire’ at least three ships belonging to the LTTE thanks to KP.”

The reported relationship between Pathmanathan and Rajapakse is particularly disgusting as the defence secretary, who is President Mahinda Rajapakse's brother, was the architect of the army's brutal offensives and responsible for its crimes. Although he has bitterly denied it, there is substantial evidence that Rajapakse personally ordered the killing of unarmed LTTE leaders as they surrendered in May 2009. As LTTE spokesman at the time, Pathmanathan denounced the killings.

The government obviously regards Pathmanathan as an important political asset. In a media interview, Gotabhaya Rajapakse declared that the detainee was providing information to bust the “LTTE international network” and had facilitated a visit to Sri Lanka by a group of nine Tamil exile leaders on June 14-20. Media Minister Keheliya Rambukwella gloated on June 24 that in the event of an international war crimes investigation “we can make KP as our witness.” Rumours that Pathmanathan might be given a significant political post have been denied by the government—mainly due to opposition criticism that it was pandering to the LTTE leader.

Charles Antonidas, a leader of the Tamil Health Organisation (THO), confirmed in an interview with the BBC that the Tamil delegation to Sri Lanka had been at Pathmanathan's encouragement. "We were trying to reach out to the government to discuss humanitarian issues but didn't have any success for a long time. Then suddenly when we had this opportunity we thought of taking it," Antonidas said. He added that Pathmanathan was now considered a "partner in the reconciliation process" by the government.

Speaking to the *Sunday Observer* on July 5, Gotabhaya Rajapakse explained: "KP had told them categorically that there was no point in reviving the LTTE's separatist ideology. He also explained to them the steps the government had taken for a sustainable future for Tamils and invited them to work closely with the government for a better future for the Tamils."

At Pathmanathan's initiative, and with the government's approval, a new non-governmental organisation (NGO) has been set up—the North-East Rehabilitation and Development Organisation (NERDO)—purportedly to help resettle displaced Tamils and reeducate ex-LTTE fighters. The outfit fits in with the Colombo government's plans to maintain the military occupation of the North and East of the island and to turn it into cheap labour platform for foreign investors.

Other Tamil exile groups have been critical of Pathmanathan alleged close collaboration with the Rajapakse government, which is responsible for the slaughter of Tamil civilians and the incarceration of more than a quarter of a million Tamil civilians in heavily guarded "welfare villages". Thousands of Tamils continue to be held without trial as "terrorist suspects" in unknown locations.

But in one way or another, all of the former LTTE groups and Tamil parties are seeking alliances with sections of the Colombo political establishment or the major powers. The Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the LTTE's former parliamentary mouthpiece, has fractured into rival organisations—some joined the Rajapakse government, while the TNA supported the opposition candidate, ex-general Sarath Fonseka, in presidential elections in January. As army head, Fonseka is directly responsible for the brutal offensives that led to the LTTE's defeat.

In February, various ex-LTTE organisations came together in London to form the Global Tamil Forum (GTF), which claims to be the "authentic voice" of the Tamil diaspora—that is, of the hundreds of thousands of Tamils around the world who have fled Sri Lanka. It met in the British parliament building with the blessing of the then Labour government and was addressed by the foreign secretary, opposition spokesmen and the US

assistant secretary of state Robert Blake. US and British involvement has nothing to do with concern about human rights in Sri Lanka, but is aimed at using the issue and the GTF to pressure the Rajapakse government and undercut China's growing influence in Colombo.

The political trajectory of Pathmanathan and all of these groupings is not an aberration, but the product of the LTTE's program of bourgeois separatism. The LTTE's perspective of a separate capitalist state of Tamil Eelam represented the interests of the Tamil elites, not those of the working class and rural masses. The LTTE always sought the support of one of other major or regional power to achieve its goals.

The LTTE's military defeat was primarily the outcome of its political program. Organically incapable of making any appeal to the working class either in Sri Lanka or internationally, the LTTE leaders issued futile appeals for the intervention of the very powers that supported Rajapakse's war. In the wake of the military collapse, the various LTTE fragments have sought to find a political home for themselves either in the Colombo establishment or as the pawns of one of the major powers.

Tamil workers and rural poor, however, do not have such an option. Like their Sinhalese and Muslim counterparts, they confront savage attacks on their living standards as the Rajapakse government carries out the demands of the International Monetary Fund for austerity measures. In the North and East, the security forces continue to trample on basic democratic rights.

A fundamental reappraisal is needed that rejects the LTTE's communalist perspective and turns to a socialist program and the fight for a workers' and farmers' government. That is only possible by uniting workers—Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim—regardless of language and ethnicity in the struggle for their common class interests. The Socialist Equality Party is the only organisation that fights for such a perspective—a Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and Eelam as part of the Union of Socialist Republics in South Asia and internationally.



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