

# LTTE's overtures

## *To mend fences with India*

T. S. SUBRAMANIAN

**A**N unpublicised meeting between Rajiv Gandhi and Kasi Anandan, a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) representative, that would have had far-reaching consequences if Rajiv Gandhi had been alive, took place on March 5 in New Delhi.

The meeting came about after the LTTE had made overtures to the effect that it would like to meet Rajiv Gandhi and mend its relationship with him. Kasi Anandan is a central committee member of the People's Front for Liberation Tigers, the political wing of the LTTE. He had left the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) to join the LTTE. He is also a popular poet.

The meeting, which lasted about 30 minutes at Rajiv Gandhi's residence, went off very well and the former Prime Minister suggested to Kasi Anandan that the LTTE wait till the elections to the Lok Sabha were over.

The LTTE representative informed him that the organisation wanted to "forget the past" and start a new chapter in its relations with him. Significantly, he told Rajiv Gandhi that the LTTE would "never act against India." The LTTE was looking forward to Rajiv Gandhi's return to power for it would enable India to take firm initiatives in solving the Tamil problem.

Rajiv Gandhi was equally effusive in his replies. He wanted Kasi Anandan to convey his "greetings to Prabakaran" and that Prabakaran should "continue the struggle." The former Prime Minister made detailed enquiries about the situation on the ground and what exactly was the current goal of the LTTE.

Rajiv Gandhi's "greetings" to Prabakaran were later conveyed to the LTTE supremo, who was obviously pleased with the renewal of contact with the former Prime Minister.

The meeting ended with Rajiv Gandhi agreeing that the LTTE could and indeed should stay in touch with him.

Following the meeting, Kasi Anandan made statements urging that India and the LTTE should bury the hatchet. "We (the LTTE) want to be

on the side of India and we also want India to be on our side. We have never worked against India at any time," Kasi Anandan said. He added, "The confrontation between the IPKF and the LTTE is an unfortunate chapter in our history and it should be totally forgotten by both the sides. As far as we are concerned, even when we fought India, we never sought help from Pakistan or China, which are inimical to India."

He also refuted the general impression that the LTTE had a rapport only with the Tamil Nadu Government and not the Government of India itself. "We have always maintained our contacts with Delhi and in future also we would like to maintain our communications with Delhi," he said significantly.

In the wake of the meeting with Rajiv Gandhi, the LTTE leader Sathasivam Krishnakumar alias Kittu, speaking from his residence in London, repeatedly appealed for "India's mediation" to solve the Tamil problem. He wanted India to pressure Colombo to halt its military operations in the Tamil areas of the island. He wanted a "powerful" country like India to mediate if and when negotiations were conducted between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government. Colombo should assure New Delhi that the Tamils would be provided with a security set-up under international safeguards and India should pressure the Sri Lankan Government to meet the genuine aspirations of the Tamils, said Kittu.

Later, Kasi Anandan reportedly met the officials of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Permission was also given to the LTTE to ferry the wounded LTTE cadres across the Palk Strait for medical treatment in Tamil Nadu, under President's rule. This had been stopped for a while after the Chandra Shekhar Government came to power.

In a significant remark, former Union Minister of State for Home and Congress(I) leader P. Chidambaram observed on May 5, "Besides our duty of providing shelter and protection to the refugees, we must offer refuge to the injured militants, provided they do not use Tamil Nadu as a base for their

activities." Again, in a remark pregnant with meaning, Chidambaram stressed that the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987 should still be the basis for any future action and that it should bind both the Sri Lankan Government and the Tamil militants, with India offering its "good offices." He, however, wanted the Tamil Nadu Governor to discuss with the Centre the possibility of sending the Tamil militants, detained in special camps in the State, back to Sri Lanka.

All these remarks from Kasi Anandan, Kittu and Chidambaram did not go unnoticed in Colombo. There was also nervousness in the Sri Lankan Government about the prospect of Rajiv Gandhi becoming Prime Minister again as the Congress(I) was the only party which kept insisting that the Indo-Sri Lankan Agreement should still be the basis for any fresh initiative to solve the Tamil problem. But Colombo considered the Agreement dead.

For Sri Lankan President R. Premadasa also, the very mention of the Agreement was like the waving of a red rag in front of a bull. He had stoutly opposed the Agreement and even boycotted the signing ceremony. When he contested the presidency in December 1988, he openly demanded the withdrawal of the IPKF from the island and blamed the presence of the IPKF for the recrudescence of brutal violence by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in the southern parts of Sri Lanka.

Even seasoned Sri Lankan Tamils, who are antagonistic towards the LTTE, are reluctant to jump to the conclusion that the LTTE is behind the assassination. "The LTTE is not so naive as to commit political harakiri by killing Rajiv Gandhi at this stage, when the elections are halfway through and there was a probability of his returning to power," an observer of the Sri Lankan Tamil struggle said.

A Sri Lankan Tamil leader pointed out that if it is proved that the LTTE was behind the killing of Rajiv Gandhi, it could be thrown out lock, stock and barrel from India. This would mean the loss of an invaluable sanctuary, so essential for any guerilla organisation fighting for a separate country. ■

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