

"KP should face a trial like the Nürnberg Nazi Trial"

Who else is more appropriate to speak of the LTTE and its Terror Network, than the two internationally acclaimed experts on LTTE terrorism? Both are born and raised in Sri Lanka. Editors of Sri Lanka Watch have interviewed both these experts about their views on the arrest of KP.

Sri Lankan born Prof. Dr. Rohan Gunaratna is a distinguished expert on terrorism. He has written a large number of books on this subject. Two bestsellers written by him are "Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror" and "Sri Lanka – A lost Revolution" (A detailed account of the JVP). Prof. Gunaratna heads the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, one of the largest counter terrorism research and training centres in the world which trains even western intelligence authorities.

Sri Lanka Watch presents the exclusive interview with Prof. Rohan Gunaratna.

SLW: How was Kumaran Pathmanathan's or better known as KP arrest handled and what were the successful ingredients of it?

Prof. RG: Leadership is the most vital ingredient in the successful fight against terrorism. This is followed by Intelligence, which is the spearhead of counterterrorism, and in this case, international security and intelligence cooperation. KP's arrest was masterminded by Secretary Defence of Sri Lanka Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, a highly determined and a highly committed leader at the apex of the Sri Lankan national security and defence establishment. Even before Prabhakaran was killed and KP was appointed as the new leader of the LTTE, Secretary Rajapaksa launched a discrete operation to lay the ground work to cooperate and collaborate with Malaysian and Thai counterparts. Thailand, Malaysia, Norway, India and every other country where KP operated and violated their sovereignty by raising and moving funds, sourcing weapons and other resources to kill people should be grateful to the team of highly dedicated specialists that surveilled, tracked and detained KP.

KP enabled the LTTE to establish itself as one of the world's most dangerous terrorist groups. KP procured the explosives used by LTTE to build the first suicide jacket in 1991, a technology that would be copied by two dozen terrorist groups worldwide. The network built by KP facilitated the LTTE to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi, a former Prime Minister of India. Similarly, 50 tons of TNT and 10 tons of RDX (the plastic explosive) purchased by KP from the Rubezone chemical plant in the Ukraine in 1994 killed thousands of civilians and soldiers. No terrorist group in history had ever purchased such a large quantity of explosives.

When KP was captured he was the leader of the LTTE. Prabhakaran had appointed KP to the Central Committee of the LTTE and made him the Secretary of LTTE's International Affairs Division. For nearly three decades, KP has been the de facto—and now the de jure—head of the LTTE international network. After the death of Prabhakaran and the core leadership in May 2009, KP emerged as his successor. Capturing KP was Sri Lanka's no one national security priority. Sri Lanka accomplished it successfully in collaboration with its partners thanks to a highly dedicated and committed team of leaders led by Secretary Rajapaksa.

SLW: Who is KP?

Prof. RG: Born in Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka on April 6, 1955, Tharmalingam Shanmugam Kumaran alias Kumaran Pathmanathan was known within the LTTE as KP. He entered the University of Jaffna in the mid 1970s. He has been involved with terrorist groups since the late 1970s. KP developed a close relationship with LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. Since India's foreign intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), supported the LTTE from August 1983 to July 1987, KP enjoyed the immunity of the government of India. Indian intelligence officers facilitated his activities not only in India but also overseas. India's sponsorship of the LTTE gave KP a head start in building a state-of-the-art network in a short period of time.

Since the LTTE was a known terrorist group, KP operated under a dozen aliases. He also used multiple passports, including Sri Lankan, Indian, Swiss, Malaysian, and Egyptian. Since the early 1980s, KP operated from India (Madras and Bombay), Malaysia (Penang and Kuala Lumpur), and Thailand (Bangkok and Chiang Mai). He also visited the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East to procure weapons and dual-use technologies. As the LTTE is a well-known terrorist group, KP operated through three dozen LTTE front, cover, and sympathetic organizations.

SLW: In one of your earlier interviews to the Sri Lankan media, you stated "as long as KP is alive there will not be any peace in Sri Lanka". So with this arrest do you think the LTTE is crushed globally for ever and Sri Lanka can hope for peace?

Prof. RG: The LTTE has been militarily defeated, but it maintains a state of the art propaganda, fundraising, procurement, and shipping infrastructure overseas—particularly in the West. The LTTE has offices and cells in about 60 countries. About a million Sri Lankan Tamils live overseas, allowing the LTTE to establish a significant overseas presence. For a quarter century, the LTTE raised funds, procured supplies and transported them to Sri Lanka to support LTTE's campaign of violence. The shadowy leader responsible for building that clandestine network, Kumaran Pathmanathan (also known as KP), was appointed as the new leader of the LTTE in May 2009.

KP was the principal facilitator and enabler that transformed the LTTE into one of the world's most dangerous terrorist groups. Although KP is not a public figure, he was well known to international security and intelligence services in both the East and West. Wanted for crimes in several countries—including India, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka—KP was of security interest worldwide. To engage the services of a range of officials and specialists, KP bribed government officials and paid for other services. In the intelligence world, KP earned the same notoriety as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of al Qaeda's 9/11 operation.

Capturing KP is the beginning of a masterplan Sri Lanka should develop to bring down the entire LTTE network from New Zealand to Eritrea and to Canada. Sri Lanka will face many challenges in the coming years. Nonetheless, the events of the last thirty years demonstrate that Sri Lanka is a resilient nation. Even if ten organizations like the LTTE emerge, if we have good leaders, the government will be able to neutralize the threat. Although the LTTE in Sri Lanka is dead and KP is in custody, there will be efforts by the vast LTTE network overseas to revive violence.

As long as support for LTTE persists overseas, Sri Lanka will remain under threat. To meet these threats, it is paramount for Sri Lanka to build a powerful external security and intelligence service and a counter propaganda organization within the Foreign ministry of Sri Lanka. By investing in recruiting and training the best minds, future governments will be able to detect threats and neutralize them before they manifest. Although KP is in custody, Sri Lanka will also have to build its capacity to respond to developments overseas. The fight against terrorism, both domestic and foreign is never ending.

SLW: It is said the arrest was successful due information received from the "inner circle" of the new LTTE leadership. Some other source of information says the authorities were able to track him down because the intelligence agents had the satellite phone details since the death of Prabhakaran therefore they were able to track his movements. What do you know about these possibilities?

Prof. RG: KP has been a target of the international intelligence community since 1984 when he purchased the first LTTE ship Cholan. After IPKF fought LTTE, the Indian services went after him and after Rajiv Gandhi was killed RAW wanted to kill him. However, most governments, including Sri Lanka lacked the sustained interest and the commitment until Gotabhaya Rajapaksa was appointed Secretary Defence three years ago. With the LTTE weakening particularly after Prabhakaran was killed, the flow of foreign intelligence from governments worldwide have increased. Those opposed to KP but still within the LTTE provided the most crucial intelligence.

SLW: What can you tell us about the secretive rift between KP, Perinpanayagam Sivaparan and the New York based Rudrakumaran after the death of Prabhakaran for the leadership of the Exile LTTE network and control of its wealth and could it be that which lead to this arrest ?

Prof. RG: There has been significant infighting between different LTTE factions. Some have cooperated with governments overseas and even with Sri Lankan government. There is a lot of work that needs to be done overseas. Many other leaders of the LTTE such as V Rudrakumaran and his associates are currently under investigation for supporting the LTTE, a proscribed and a designated terrorist group. It is very likely that the US will arrest many leaders of the LTTE living in the US or working with the US network.

SLW: How much of KP do the Tamil Diaspora know or was it dazzled by the billionaire of the underworld looking up to him desperately for the political James Bond?

Prof. RG: KP was known only to those who supported the LTTE within the Tamil diaspora. Less than 20% of the Sri Lankan Tamils and those of Sri Lankan origin supported the LTTE. Although the LTTE popularized that the LTTE had the support of the Tamil community worldwide, it is not true. Certainly KP was the darling of the LTTE network overseas. Willing to take risks and work long hours, KP earned the trust of Prabhakaran and his family, as well as other LTTE leaders. When Prabhakaran married Madhivadhani in Madras, KP sat next to Prabhakaran. Initially LTTE chartered ships, but after the group was duped KP was entrusted with building LTTE's own shipping fleet. KP appointed and supervised Sri Lankan Tamils who volunteered to serve as LTTE accountants and bankers, procurement officers, ship captains, and crew. The ships managed by KP initially transported the weapons to Indian waters, and thereafter to the Sri Lankan waters. Using trawlers, LTTE transported the weapons and related technologies to shore. To manage the operation, KP traveled extensively worldwide building a financial, procurement, and shipping network.

A few professional Tamils in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and New York visited arms exhibitions on KP's behalf. KP was so daring that he even visited the U.S. to procure weapons. A master of disguise and forgery, KP was able to escape the attention of law enforcement and security and intelligence services. A former accountant of the LTTE said

that whenever he met with KP at an airport, KP recognized him—and not vice versa. KP was LTTE's James Bond but since detained he is trying to negotiate with the government of Sri Lanka.

SLW: What will happen to all the wealth belonging to LTTE abroad?

Prof. RG: Government of Sri Lanka has a Financial Intelligence Unit in the Central Bank. It is staffed by highly dedicated personnel who have lists of those who have contributed to the LTTE. They must distinguish between those who give money voluntarily and those who were forced to give to the LTTE. This is the biggest challenge.

SLW: It is still not clear what has happened to Pottu Amman. Is he still alive? If so where could he be? In Germany ? (His relatives are in Bremen)

Prof. RG: Intelligence reports indicate that Pottu, who masterminded the Gandhi killing and several other high profile killings, committed suicide. It was not before, he shot his own wife in the head. Both his sons, who were LTTE members were killed. Those who take arms and kill civilians will sooner or later meet violence. This is the lesson of history.

SLW: Do you think Gotabhaya Rajapaksa become a 'bugbear' to the interests of the western world that prospers on the arms trade and also ensuring that the Third World do not create avenues of agricultural and industrial progress that will threaten the west?

Prof. RG: Secretary Rajapaksa is a man who knows the east and the west. He also knows that Sri Lanka is a very small country and its limitations. He is fully aware that the West could give limited support because LTTE had penetrated Tamil community organizations and exercised constituency and electoral pressure on Western politicians. Since the LTTE was dismantled, he is working to build those relationships that suffered as a result of a temporary misunderstanding between a few leaders in Europe and Colombo. Although the epicentre of global power is shifting to Asia, the West is still and will remain in the next decade the most important zone of global political, military and economic activity. Secretary Rajapaksa is a man who can think clearly. He understands that all the ten fingers are different but to catch the ball he needs to use all the fingers. He is working with everyone including with the Europeans and the Americans. .

SLW: Where did the British and French governments err here? We're all ignore Sweden because its leaders exposed themselves as Tiger supporters and Norway was even worse.

Prof. RG: Europe that host large migrant populations from conflict zones have become a safe haven for multiple terrorist groups. Europe is like a zoo where you can find Hezbollah, Hamas, Al Qaeda, PKK and also LTTE. Europeans are learning slowly after the Madrid and London bombings. They need to get their act together and pass robust legislation to prevent foreign terrorist support activity. It must not have a double standard.

SLW: In the 1970s the LTTE focused on tuition centres to drag their cadres and supporters. They used the same method across the Diaspora abroad with emotional politics. Exile LTTE leaders focused on the Tamil Diaspora, specially the 2nd Generation of young people in Schools, Universities etc. dragging them emotionally into LTTE politics. Where as some have even never visited Sri Lanka. What now for the Tamil Diaspora now that KP has been taken into custody?

Prof. RG: Tamil leaders, both at home and overseas, must take control of their people and start to guide them away from the madness of Prabhakaran. The whole world is becoming globalized meaning anyone and everyone should be able to live anywhere and with different ethnic and religious group. We all need to be tolerant and moderate. Prabhakaran was a dinosaur - he did not adapt to the 21st century world. KP is irrelevant now. After Prabhakaran, KP was the biggest human rights violator of Sri Lanka. Like the Nazi trial of Nürnberg in Germany, KP should be charged for crimes and tried in a special courts in Sri Lanka and given the appropriate punishment he deserves.

SLW: If one can focus on a reality that has impacted the Tamil Diaspora, did the LTTE become the agent of revenge against the Sinhalese and Prabhakaran exploited it to the hilt?

Prof. RG: Like Osama bin Laden or Abdullah Ocalan, Prabhakaran was a politician trying to make out that he was fighting for a cause. After dividing the Sri Lankan communities, Prabhakaran brought more suffering on the innocent Tamils and others more than any other leader in Sri Lanka. All Sri Lankans should work together to ensure that a future Prabhakaran should not emerge. We must put in place mechanisms where there is no space for hatred or discrimination. Both government and community leaders, especially Tamil leaders must step forward to rebuild the broken bridges and strengthen the 2000 years of historical friendship between the Sinhalese and Tamils.

The German Translation of this Interview can be read at <http://lttewatch.wordpress.com>

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