
Mahaveer '08 and Mumbai mayhem

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It ain't Over Till the Fat Laddie Swings By: Dayan Jayatilleka It ain't over till it's over, or as the Americans put it, in a reference to the opera, it ain't over till the fat lady sings. The Mahaveera Day 2008 speech by Velupillai Prabhakaran, one of the world's most notorious and certainly tubbiest terrorist leaders, demonstrates that there can be no solution to Sri Lanka's conflict so long as he remains alive and active, and has not been brought to justice. In our case it ain't over till the fat laddie swings. In the first place the man is an outrageously unrepentant liar and assumes that everyone suffers from amnesia. In his speech he says that "It may be noted that during the long history of our struggle, we have not conducted any act of aggression against any member state of the international community". Let us forget for a moment that Sri Lanka is a member state of the international community, a fact that is proved by his complaint in the same speech, of the military and diplomatic assistance that Sri Lanka has obtained from members of the international community on precisely that basis. The man obviously believes that the assassination by suicide bomber of India's former Prime Minister and (at the time) leader of the Opposition, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, former chairperson of SAARC, son of legendary former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and grandson of the iconic first Prime Minister of independent India, Shri Nehru, is not "an act of aggression against any member of the international community"!

In the second place he lies about the history of negotiations, about the absence of an alternative. There were alternatives for the last two decades or more. In September 1987, the Sri Lankan –or Sinhala, as he would put it—armed forces in the North and east had been confined to barracks, the Indian peacekeepers were the buffer between the Sinhalese and Tamils, and an Interim administration covering the Northern and eastern provinces had been created by Executive fiat. Of the twelve seats on that council, seven, including the chairmanship, were offered to the LTTE, and yet Prabhakaran refused. He opened fire on the IPKF by October 10th that year. Jump cut to 2003. He had arrived at a ceasefire in 2001, not because he was winning as he claims in this speech (doubtless referring to the Katunayaka attack) but because, several months after Katunayake, the Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols of the Sri Lankan Special Forces had begun to pick off his command structure—in short because he was taking some hard hits. In April 2003, forty plus states and multilateral agencies were to attend a donor conference in Tokyo to which the LTTE had been invited. Taking exception to its non-invitation to Washington DC, (to the sympathetic nods of Colombo's academics and coffee club cosmopolitans) it chose to boycott the Tokyo meeting. No other terrorist or insurgent movement would have done so. Instead, any other movement would have gone to the meeting, used it as a platform and protested its non-invitation to Washington. Prabhakaran did not, because he wants all or nothing and thinks that he, his cause and his movement are entitled to such special status. H.E. Dr. Dayan Jayatilleka, Sri Lanka's Ambassador & Permanent Representative to the UN Geneva Following the LTTE's pull out from that last "peace process", Tiger spokesman Anton Balasingham declared in writing that there had been no agreement to explore internal self-determination amounting to federalism within a united Sri Lanka. This provoked the usually mild and compliant Norwegians to release the minutes of the sessions at which this agreement had been arrived at. If federalism was what he wanted, Prabhakaran had a clear choice: not walk out of the CFA process, not renege on the understanding to explore federalism and not enforce a coercive boycott of the Presidential election of 2005 at which the opposition candidate, in collaboration with the sitting (but outgoing) President, was committed to a bipartisan consensus for a federal constitution. This is one of Prabhakaran's many consistencies: the sabotage of any possibility of reform, the assassination of reformists, the foreclosure of reformist alternatives, and then the Big Lie of the absence of alternatives as an excuse to continue or resume large scale armed violence and terrorism. The other consistency echoes and re-echoes throughout his speech this year. This is the reiteration of a fundamentalist case. There is Tamil land, from ancient days, and there is Sinhala land. The Sinhalese have no right to be present on the Tamil land. Axiomatically the Tamil land must translate itself into an independent sovereign country, Tamil Eelam. There is not the slightest glimmer of any possible solution, however far-reaching, within a united country, a single Sri Lanka. The international community which boycotts and blockades the elected Hamas administration in Gaza because it does not recognise the right of existence of the state of Israel must eschew all contacts with Tamil separatism which does not accept the bottom line that that any solution – however radical — must be within the borders of the legitimate sovereign state of Sri Lanka. Prabhakaran's speech reiterates the zero sum character of the game. There is nothing in that discourse that is negotiable. It leaves the state only two alternatives: Capitulation and withdrawal or fight on to reunify and reintegrate the whole territory of this small island. In his speech Prabhakaran clearly indicates where he places his bets: Tamil Nadu, and through Tamil Nadu, India, and Tamils the world over. It is a pan-Tamilian appeal, with hints of a Greater Tamil Eelam as single psychological space, if not an immediately political one. The Mahaveera speech 2008 coincides with the multiple terrorist attacks in Mumbai. There is a pernicious theory which distinguishes between international terrorist networks of "jihadis" and terrorist causes which are home grown and have territorial aspirations. This is nonsense. Every terrorist organization has some territorial referent, whether it is Kashmir or Palestine. As Prof Robert Pape's research (his data base contains every single terrorist act committed any where in the world going back decades) concludes, every terrorist cause, especially every terrorist cause that deploys suicide killers, sees itself as fighting for the liberation of some territory from some alien domination or presence in one or more geographic location, be it the Taliban, Al Qaeda (US troops on Islamic soil including in Saudi Arabia), Islamic Jihad or the Tamil Tigers. It is not that no distinctions are observable or legitimate as between various armed movements, but these boil down to the distinction between those who resort the witting use of lethal violence against non-combatant targets and those who avoid such use. That is the distinction between terrorism and armed insurgency, guerrilla warfare, or armed liberation struggles. Terrorism is a method. It is deployed in the service of an array of cause and springs from an array of

inspirational sources or distortions of such sources. Terrorists are not necessarily those who only target civilians. Most terrorist organizations target armed forces at one time or another, while also going for no combat targets. Al Qaeda, the Taliban, the various "jihadi" organizations in areas of Pakistan and Kashmir, attack variously the armed forces of the US and its allies, Pakistan and India—but this does not exempt them from the appellation of terrorist because they also kill the unarmed and the innocent. Terrorists learn from each other just as medical researchers or athletes or musicians do. They learn from each others' example and behaviour, tactics and techniques. This is quite irrespective of the differences in their causes and ideologies. South Asia is one of the world's most volatile and dangerous regions, not least because of the presence of nuclear weapons. Ethnic, religious tribal and kinship ties move across state borders. This draws states into the internal affairs of others. If the states of South Asia do not adopt a consistent policy towards terrorist movements; if there is no united front of states against terrorist movements, all states and societies in the region will suffer, with deleterious consequences for far-flung areas of the globe including the most powerful and affluent. Prabhakaran is one of the best known names in South Asian and global terrorism. The LTTE is a well-known terrorist "brand". The fate of the LTE will send a signal throughout the region and the world. Prabhakaran's speech demonstrates that he is unrepentant in his maximalism, fanaticism and political fundamentalism. He displays once again and even more than before, the syndrome that most fanatics do: that of Hubris. Hubris, as we know from the ancient Greeks, attracts Nemesis. Prabhakaran and his Tigers have left us no choice if we are to save this island from being split apart on ethnic lines and descended upon by pan Tamil expansionism. Nemesis is awaiting Prabhakaran in the form of the spearheads of the Sri Lankan armed forces, fighting in the mud and rain, but closing in. It must never be forgotten though, that Kilinochchi is the penultimate prize. This war can only end the way it did in Angola with the death of Jonas Savimbi and in Chechnya with the death of Djokar Dudayev and Shamil Basayev. It can only end in the jungles and townships of Mullaitivu where Prabhakaran retreated and recovered from the IPKF and then from the Sri Lankan army after Riviresa. Let none, no factor or force, internal or external, stop or delay Prabhakaran's rendezvous with Nemesis. (These are the personal views of the writer) (Courtesy : The Island)