

Top Tiger leaders killed in a major debacle for LTTE

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by D.B.S. Jeyaraj The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) organization suffered a terrible blow in the Aanandapuram area of Puthukkudiyiruppu AGA division. In what may very well be the defining moment of the on going war, the tigers have lost a vast array of illustrious fighting commanders as well as large numbers of cadres in a single battle.

More than 525 bodies of dead LTTE fighters have been recovered and a special military intelligence squad is busy identifying those killed. The details are being revealed in stages. The LTTE keeps "official silence" over the debacle and its propaganda networks keep "mum" but the bad news is spreading slowly yet surely. LTTE stalwart and head of its sports division "Paappaa" telephoned the elder brother of "Colonel"; Theepan living in Canada and informed him of the demise of his sibling. Likewise different tiger officials are informing close family members of the other tigers about what has happened to their departed relatives. Among the fallen tigers "Col"; Theepan (presumably promoted posthumously as Brigadier) is perhaps the single biggest loss to the movement. This 20 year LTTE veteran hails from Kandawalai in Kilinochchi district and served as overall commander of the LTTE northern front fighting formations. Sivatheepan Thavabalasingham alias Theepan was the de-facto deputy military commander of the LTTE after the demise of Balraj. Along with Theepan, the top four woman fighter commanders have also been killed. Vidhusha, special commander of Maalathy regiment, her deputy and Maalathy regimental commander Kamalini, Durga, special commander of Sothia regiment and her deputy cum Commander Mohanaa have all been killed. An unconfirmed report states that women's wing political commissar Thamilini has also been killed. Among other senior tigers killed were the special commander and commander of the Jeyanthan infantry brigade, Keerthi and Nagesh. The Jeyanthan brigade is raised from Eastern province cadres. Manickapodi Maheswaran alias Keerthi is a native of Arasaditheevu in Batticaloa district and served as intelligence chief for the east earlier. Selvaratnam Sundaram alias Nagesh is a native of Periyaporatheevu and has served as district military commander earlier. Both remained loyal to Tiger supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran and despite being eastern sons of the soil opted to fight against Vinayagamorthy Muraleetharan alias Karuna after he revolted against the leadership citing northern hegemony. Another huge loss is that of Gaddafi also known as Viduthalai and Amuthan. This one-time chief bodyguard of Prabhakaran was later a commander of the Imran-Pandian regiment. Currently he was in charge of the tiger training academy. The LTTE's elite special forces division is named after former tiger leader Radha. This force was led by Silambarasan. He was killed. The deputy-commander of Radha regiment was Anbu. He was seriously injured and captured alive. He died later. Likewise Asmi the leader of "Ponnamman"; mining unit was also seriously injured and captured alive. He too died later. The leader of "Kittu"; artillery unit, Manivannan and chief of "Kutty Sri"; mortar unit Gopal were also killed. An unconfirmed report states that S. Thangan, the deputy-political commissar and administrative officer under SP Thamilselvan has also killed. Among other senior tigers killed who have been identified are Ruban, Panjan, Aadithyan and Chitrangan. A senior sea tiger Mahindan has also been killed. There is much bewilderment about how so many top tigers could get killed in a single battle and why so many top commanders got caught up in one location. Apparently the tiger leaders were holed up in Aanandapuram along the Puthukkudiyiruppu - Puthumaathalan road busily planning a major counter-attack on the armed forces. What happened however was that the 58 and 53 divisions and task force 8 mounted an unexpectedly successful military operation that yielded quick success. The 58 proceeding south by south-east from northern Puthukkudiyiruppu and the 53 & TF 8 proceeding north by north-east from Southern Puthukkudiyiruppu advanced rapidly and linked up at Pachaipullumottai junction along the Puthukkudiyiruppu road behind LTTE positions. The LTTE cadres engaged in preparing for the major assault were cut off. Realising that top tigers were stranded in Aanandapuram and suspecting that Prabhakaran himself may be there, the army moved swiftly and encircled tiger positions. Though Prabhakaran was not there other important tigers were ensnared. The 4th, 6th, 8th, 12th, 14th and 20th Gajabahu battalions, 5th Vijayabahu, 9th Gemunu Watch, 11th and 20th SL Light Infantry along with 1 special forces and 2 commando got into action. Meanwhile a footpath from Ambalavanpokkanai to Pachaipullumottai used as an emergency supply route by the LTTE was also interdicted. Thus more than a thousand tiger cadres and leaders were encircled in a two sq km area consisting of coconut plantations and palmyrah groves. In a desperate bid to break the siege, Sea tiger special commander Soosai sent a contingent by sea to aid the beleaguered comrades at arms. The Navy maintaining strict vigil, engaged the flotilla and beat back the sea tigers. Eventually a sizable number of cadres led by "Col"; Bhanu succeeded in penetrating the cordon and escaping to safety. Bhanu himself was injured. The rest of the tigers under the overall command of Theepan were not so lucky. In a three day siege the tigers were deprived of food, water and medical supplies. Massive aerial bombardment and artillery shelling was also done. Appeals were made in Tamil through amplifiers to the tigers to surrender but few heeded the call. The tigers in the courageous tradition of the LTTE, fought on against overwhelming odds preferring to "die on their feet" rather than "live on their knees". It was all over on Sunday April 5th and the soldiers are now gradually recovering LTTE bodies and identifying them. On Monday around 525 bodies had been recovered and around 60 identified. Unsubstantiated allegations have been made by pro-tiger elements in the Diaspora that incendiary bombs and chemical weapons were used to overcome the LTTE. Military analysts however were sceptical of such allegations as the debacle seemed to be a classical example of a successful outflanking manoeuvre. The Aanandapuram debacle was preceded by another incident which proved to be a major loss to the LTTE. The special commander of the Charles Anthony infantry division Amuthab and its commander Gobinath were killed on March 31st in the fighting in and around Iranapalai east. The loss of these brave fighters who always led from the front had a demoralising effect on cadres. This loss of morale is attributed to be cause of weakened tiger defences leading to rapid breaching, linking and encircling by the armed forces. Apart from this development, senior commander Sornam has

sustained serious injuries while another leader Lawrence has received minor injuries. These were in earlier rounds of fighting elsewhere. Also, Charles Anthony, the eldest son of LTTE chief, sustained minor injuries in the fighting against the 55 division in the coast adjacent to Chalai lagoon. The Aanandapuram debacle also resulted in the LTTE losing many weapons including three 130 mm artillery, five 81 mm mortars, 4 12. 7mm anti-aircraft guns and a 30 mm Peddle gun. This piece of equipment has proved very lethal in previous rounds of fighting. According to military analysts, the Aanandapuram debacle appears to be the major turning point in the defiant last stand being put up by the LTTE. The armed forces had been expecting a major counter-offensive from the LTTE for quite a while now. Ironically , the tables were turned and the expected offensive was pre-empted and thwarted. In the process the LTTE has been dealt a massive setback from which it may never recover. DBS Jeyaraj can be reached on Email: dbsjeyaraj@yahoo.com courtesy: dbsjeyaraj.com