

It was one year ago on August 5, 2009 that Thambiaiya Selvarasa Pathmanathan alias “KP” was taken into custody in Kuala Lumpur at First Tune Hotel on 316 Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman road. The former chief arms procurer of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was brought to Colombo the following day.

KP’s capture was hailed as a significant breakthrough because the senior Tiger operative was at that time the nominal chief of the re-structured LTTE. In the aftermath of the Mullivaikkal debacle resulting in the demise of LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabhakaran and senior Tiger commanders, KP assumed leadership of the movement abroad. The LTTE was re-structured with KP being appointed “Thalaimai Seyalar” or chief secretary.

With KP’s capture punitive action against him by Colombo was anticipated. However in an unexpected turn of events there evolved a remarkable relationship between captor and captive where the Sri Lankan government extended its hand of friendship towards KP in a magnanimous gesture. KP in turn reciprocated pragmatically by responding in a conciliatory and co-operative spirit.

Though under detention, KP has been afforded great autonomy of action by the Government to play a constructive role in uplifting the Tamil people and achieving ethnic reconciliation. The ex-LTTE chief has set up a new non-governmental organization known as the North – East Rehabilitation and Development Organization (NERDO).

The NERDO is focusing on the release, rehabilitation and re-settlement of ex-LTTE cadres and IDP’s of the North – East. KP himself is concentrating on garnering aid and assistance from sections of the Tamil Diaspora for the NERDO to formulate and implement projects.

The current status and role of KP is now a matter of great controversy. He is viciously attacked by extremist sections of the Diaspora as a traitor who has sold out to the Rajapaksa regime. The Sri Lankan opposition questions the “leniency” shown to the ex-LTTE chief by the Govt and contrasts it with the treatment meted out to former army chief General Fonseka.

It is against this backdrop that this writer had an extended telephone conversation with KP on Thursday Aug 5th the first anniversary of his capture. In what was a frank and open discussion in Tamil, the ex-Tiger chief disclosed several details about the past, present and future. In the process KP dispelled several rumours circulating about him and set the record straight on a number of issues.

KP is firmly of the opinion that Tamil Eelam is a lost cause and that the armed struggle is a thing of the past. He feels that the immediate priority of Sri Lankan Tamils is to get out of the tragic situation they are in right now. The future is to live with equal rights and dignity in a united, pluralistic Sri Lanka.

KP also expressed regret for the violence perpetrated by the LTTE against civilians and hardship caused during the course of the LTTE campaign for Tamil Eelam. A remorseful KP tendered an open apology to all the people of Sri Lanka for the suffering caused in the past.

Q: You were seized in Malaysia last year on August 5th. How will you describe your present situation after being under detention for one year ?

A: I was shocked when I was arrested and for about an hour I was dazed. But later I recovered. I was also worried when brought to Sri Lanka. But I believe in an almighty God. Though I feared, the worst would happen I have been fortunate. My being captured in a way has been a benefit to me. I have now got an opportunity to serve the suffering Tamil people. Our struggle has reduced our people in Sri Lanka particularly those in the Wannu to a pathetic situation. Now I have a chance to help them in a small way at least through the work of NERDO .

Q: What are the conditions under which you are being detained?

A: I am being kept in a house. I cannot go outside. But within the house I can move about freely. I am given full freedom to talk to people on the telephone. People are not allowed to meet me here. When I want to meet people outside I have to get clearance. Some officials accompany me when I have to go out to meet them. I also have unrestricted e-mail access

Q: Were you ill-treated in any way?

A: No. I have been treated with great kindness and courtesy. In the early days there was some sort of mild tension. But as the days progressed an atmosphere of trust, mutual respect and cordiality prevails.

Q: How did this situation develop? Some people in the Tamil Diaspora allege that you had a "deal" with the govt and that your arrest itself was a drama? How were you arrested and brought here?

A: I know that these types of accusations are being levelled against me. But you know how I was arrested. You were the first person to write about my arrest in detail in English. When I got to read it much later I found that most of what you had written was correct except for some minor details. Whatever these people may say the truth is that I was arrested and transported to Sri Lanka

Q: Can you relate how you were caught and brought here?

A: I was sitting in the Hotel room talking to former LTTE political commissar Nadesan's brother and son who had come down from England to Malaysia. I then got a telephone call from Canada. It was Ragavan from the CMR radio . The reception was not good. So I excused myself and went out.

I sat outside on a chair in the lobby and kept talking. Suddenly a group of Malaysian officials

surrounded me. One of them said “Very sorry Mr.KP” and grasped my phone. It fell to the ground and was picked up by an officer. They asked me to come with them. I had no choice but to go with them

I was taken to the immigration detention centre in KL and kept there for nearly 36 hours for about two days and a night. I had to sleep there in the detention centre room. I realised from their conversation that I was going to be officially deported. But I was not sure whether it was going to be Sri Lanka, India ,USA or somewhere else.

Then I was taken to the KL airport where a Sri Lankan airlines plane was waiting. Then I knew I was going to Colombo. I was taken into the plane through the economy class entrance and then moved inside to the business class. There I was formally handed over to some Sri Lankan officials and brought to Colombo.

Q: You were a Resident in Thailand when you were arrested. Why did you operate out of Kuala Lumpur instead of Bangkok? Was it because you were arrested in Thailand in 2007?

A: I had been leading a quiet life in Thailand for many years when I was out of the LTTE. It was also known that I was living there. So when I started being active in the LTTE again I did not want to attract attention to my family in Thailand. That is why I moved to KL. Also it was easy for people from all over to travel to Malaysia and meet me.

Actually I was never arrested in 2007 .What happened was that there was a move to arrest me then and some officials had rounded up my residence early morning. Fortunately I was not there. But the news was leaked in Sri Lanka that I had been arrested. This helped to prevent follow up action to arrest me. But after that I kept a very low profile in Thailand.

Q: What happened when you arrived in Colombo? I've heard some stories about how you established rapport with the Defence secretary at your first meeting itself?

A: During the flight to Colombo I had a long chat for about three hours with a Sri Lankan officer. He was very cordial. The way in which I was treated by the Lankan officers was very decent. That made me relaxed.

But I was still worried in my heart about what would happen after reaching Sri Lanka. To be honest I was very concerned about the Defence Secretary . The impression I had of him was that he was a tough talking Sinhala hardliner. Therefore, I was really dreading an encounter with him.

But something happened when I was taken to the Defence Secretary's residence. There was a Buddha statue there with a light shining at the back. For a few minutes I simply stood and gazed on the Buddha. My nerves got calmed by that.

In Thailand, I have gone to Buddhist temples frequently with my wife. In my house there are pictures of deities from all three religions including the Buddha. So somehow I felt that no great harm will come to me then.

The Defence Secretary was seated with some other officials. He got up as I entered and shook hands with me and said “please sit down”. He introduced the others to me. Mr. Gotabaya was very polite. He told me not to worry about anything. I don’t exactly remember what I then told him but it was something like this “ I saw the Buddha statue near the entrance and felt safe and calm”.

Q: Your reference to the Buddha statue incident will also be twisted by your critics within the Tamil Diaspora to portray you as a traitor praising the Buddha?

A: I know .You are right but I am telling you what really happened. I don’t want to hide anything. I told about the Buddha statue to the nine-member Tamil expatriate delegation that came to Sri Lanka last June also.

Because of my home environment and my wife’s religious belief I am familiar with Buddhist worship and temples . So seeing the Buddha statue really helped me emotionally. This is the truth. If they want to attack me because of that , then let them do it. I don’t care. I have nothing against the Buddha or Buddhism.

Q: I understand your feelings. So how did your meeting with the Defence secretary go?

A:Cakes and tea were served. The Defence Secretary said that they had tried to solve the problem peacefully but were compelled to wage full fledged war. He said it was sad that finally all the LTTE leaders including Prabhakaran had to die in the war.

He also had lots of information about the communications within the LTTE during the last days of war. He asked me some questions and I answered truthfully . When I didn’t know something I told him so instead of bluffing. He seemed satisfied with my response. I also told him clearly that the war was over for me a long time ago and that my only goal now was to help my people recover from the war and lead normal lives.I was really amazed by the attitude of the Defence Secretary. At one point I told him that the image I had of him when I saw TV interviews was that he was a tough hardliner and that his soft behaviour was a pleasant surprise. He laughed and said”I am really like this all the time.Some of these media people irritate me. That is why I get angry like that”.

After a long conversation, he introduced a particular officer and said he was responsible for me. I was told that I could communicate with him on all matters and that I could send word through this officer to him if necessary. He then shook hands again and I was taken to a house in Colombo. So began a new chapter in my life.

Q: What happened thereafter? There are allegations and reports that you have been collaborating with the government and providing information about Diaspora LTTE activities abroad to the Govt?

A: Let me tell this clearly. When the Sri Lankan intelligence officers began talking to me there were two choices for me. One was to confront them and the other was to cooperate. If I confronted I would have had to face long prison term and not be of any use to anyone. But if I cooperated I could win their trust and confidence. This may have given me an opportunity to do be of some service to our people.

If the struggle was still continuing and my leader was alive then I would have willingly challenged the govt and not cooperated. I would have faced any consequence. But that was not so. Everything was over. So there was no point in confronting. So I chose to cooperate.

Again another point I must mention is this. I had been out of the movement from 2003 January to 2008 December. I had knowledge only about pre -2003 matters. Much of the structure had changed in these years and personnel involved had been changed by those who came after me. I told this very clearly to the intelligence officials who knew and understood my position.

When we kept on talking a funny thing happened. At one point the officers started laughing at me and said jokingly "You don't know anything about the LTTE now". They were right because I was in a way living in the past. I could only tell about things and structures existing years ago. I was not well informed about the post -2002 situation . They realised it and that is why they were laughing at me.

You know what? The Sri Lankan intelligence is not stupid as some of our people think. They are very modernized and sophisticated. Besides there is lots of exchanges with intelligence agencies of other countries. From their conversation I gathered that they were very well informed about the LTTE and its overseas structures.

Q: But the propaganda against you by the pro-Castro group headed by Nediyanavan and some media organs allege that you are supplying the govt with information about LTTE activity in the Diaspora?

A: I know that. But the truth is something different. In addition to the information gained by the intelligence people through different sources they have been presented with lots of information by Castro's people.

Q: How is that?

A: I am a little reluctant to tell this but since you are asking I will tell. When the army advanced into Viswamadhu, Castro and his department people abandoned everything and ran. So now the Sri Lankan officials have lots of data about the overseas activities of the LTTE. They have computers and data bases. They have charts of the people who gave money to the LTTE and the amounts and dates. They have copies of tax receipts. They know who the fund raisers in each country are. They know who and who are running LTTE funded businesses and

properties. They even have all the visiting cards of people from overseas who visited the Wannai during the peace talks period.

So the reality is that Castro and his dept people have let all this information fall into the hands of Sri Lankan officials. The Lankan intelligence don't need outdated or hearsay information from people like me. They have real up to date information now. The reality is that the Lankan intelligence knows far more about overseas tigers than I know. But what can I do if people keep slandering me as an informant?

Q: There were newspaper reports about the personal diaries of Castro also being recovered? Is that true?

A: I have not seen any diary. But intelligence people talking to me unofficially on a friendly basis told me that Castro's diaries of about 20 years are in their possession. Apparently he has written lots of things in those diaries. Once an officer asked me with a smile "Did Castro have a love affair?". I said that I was not aware of it. He then laughed and related the whole story. Castro had written about that too.

Q: There was a time when you were very powerful in the LTTE overseas structure. You were in charge of three key functions namely arms purchasing, macro-management of LTTE branches and fund raising. You seemed to have lost clout after you quit the movement in 2003 and found it difficult to re-establish yourself when you re-joined in 2009. What happened then? Why did you quit? Was it because you got married?

A: No ,no. It was not due to my getting married. I got married in the early nineties of the last century and not in this century. My daughter is in her late teens now.

What happened was something else. When the peace process began and a ceasefire was declared in 2002 the leader Prabhakaran tried to re-organise the LTTE in a new way. He wanted me to come and see him in the Wannai about these matters.

But I was then high on the lists of people wanted by intelligence networks of many countries. The incidents of Sep 11th 2001 in the USA had changed the security situation world-wide. I did not want to take the risk of travelling to Sri Lanka then. I knew from my own sources of information that I had been specifically targeted and that several intelligence agencies were very keen to get hold of me. So I hesitated. This annoyed my leader.

Another thing that happened was the change in the "link" between me and the movement and leader. There was this person called Velu. For more than 15 years he had been the "communications link" between me and the LTTE and Prabhakaran. Suddenly he was changed and another took over. I had grown accustomed to Velu and found myself unable to adjust to the new guy. In a way there was a break-down in communications for me. In the meantime different senior leaders in the LTTE were keen on using the ceasefire to enlarge their authority.

Sea Tiger commander Soosai wanted the sea tigers to control the LTTE shipping fleet. Up to that time I was in charge. Political Commissar SP Thamilselvan wanted to control political activity in the Diaspora. Castro who was in charge of overseas administration wanted to exert full control over overseas branches. Thamilendhi in charge of finance division wanted a greater say in fund raising functions

So they all wanted Prabhakaran to curtail my power and authority and allocate control to them. Since there was a ceasefire many people from Diaspora travelled frequently to the Wannu. So the other senior LTTE leaders were able to persuade Prabhakaran that they could handle everything through direct contacts and through telephone, fax and e-mail.

Then Prabhakaran told me that I was burdened with too many responsibilities and that I should take a rest from some of these functions. So what can I do? I agreed.

Q: Were not some allegations also made against you and some of your key assistants abroad?

A: Yes. There were some allegations. They went to the extent of getting some people including women to go to Wannu directly and complain against me, Mano in Paris and Sarve in Oslo to Prabhakaran personally. I heard some women wept and sobbed loudly in front of Prabhakaran

Q: This was a put up job then? Who was behind it?

A: Of course it was a plot. Castro and Thamilselvan were behind it. Sadly the leader was deceived and we could not defend ourselves in person.

Q: So then what happened?

A: As I said earlier the leader asked me to take rest. So I had to retire. Castro took over the overseas administration in full. He removed all the old hands whom he regarded as my loyalists. Almost everything was changed in a few months. Many old faithful LTTE activists were removed from their positions in a very unfair manner.

Q: But you were still in charge of overseas purchasing or arms procurement. Why was that changed? How did Anandarajan alias Aiyah replace you?

A: That's another story. Aiyah was in a sense my man. He had good travel documents and could travel freely. He was also a qualified accountant. So on my instructions he used to go to all the countries and audit our accounts.

Later as I became increasingly known and wanted by the intelligence agencies I was forced to restrict my travelling and movements. So I began to use him to some extent in travelling to source points where one could purchase in arms bazaars. He became familiar with these places

Then I sent him to meet Prabhakaran also as my representative. I was very confident about him and thought he was loyal to me. I was shocked when one of my friends in the Wannu asked me

“Is this guy really your man? He is poisoning the leader’s mind against you”. I learnt that Aiyah was giving an impression that he had been handling all the arms purchasing and could do everything on his own.

I realised then that Bala Annai was right about Aiyah.

Q: What did Bala Annai (Anton Balasingham) tell you about Aiyah?

A: You see when Bala Annai and Adele Aunty had come out of the Wannu by sea in 1999, I made arrangements for them to stay in Malaysia and Singapore and get medical treatment before going to London. Since I was stuck in Indonesia at that time I got Aiyah to look after them. But Bala Annai, a shrewd judge of people told me later “You are trusting this fellow but wait and see, he will grasp what you have one day”.

By the time I realised Bala Annai’s wisdom it was too late.

Q: So you were relieved from the LTTE’s overseas purchases department known as KP department? What was the reason given?

A: You see as I had told you earlier I had not been travelling to Sri Lanka to meet the leader because I felt that it was dangerous for me to travel about as I was high on the wanted list of so many intelligence agencies. Now Prabhakaran told me that he did not want me to risk danger by travelling about to purchase arms
He simply told me to take rest for a while and to try and come and meet him. He said only when I meet you in person can I tell you what I think and what my plans are.

After this I had no choice other than to relinquish my duties
Prabhakaran said that those who would replace me will continue to ask me for advice. But that never happened

Q: When did this happen? Was there an estrangement with Prabhakaran and yourself? What happened next?

A: This happened in the latter part of 2002. From 2003 I was out of the movement in day to day life but had never formally resigned or quit the movement. It was like retirement without a pension.

There was also no estrangement like that with Prabhakaran. I can never be estranged from him. My loyalty and respect to him never changed. He was my leader and friend and like an elder brother to me. But I was hurt by what happened and did not contact him regularly as I did

earlier. He may have expected me to do so but I did not . We sort of drifted away from each other but never split.Our mutual regard remained.

Q: Part of the campaign against you is that you and Prabhakaran had fallen out and that you were regarded as a traitor by him then?

A: I am aware of that. Since I went off the LTTE radar after 2003 the new crop of tiger activists abroad don't know anything about me or the past. So anything could be said against me.

The reality was that both of us had great regard and affection for each other though we had parted ways.

Thanks to an incident there is written testimony about Prabhakaran's regard for me. One of the LTTE Air wing operatives abroad needed to consult me for some matter. He was not sure whether the leader would approve. So he sent a message asking the leader whether he could contact his "Munnaal Nanbar" (former friend) KP.

Prabhakaran replied in writing that he could do so and emphasised that KP was not a former friend but was "Indrum endrum nalla visuvaasamana nanban" (Now and forever a god and loyal friend)

Q: So when you went into retirement from the LTTE. Did you think it was all over and between you and the tigers?

A: I did think so at that time. I remember telling my wife then that I was out of the LTTE and that I would spend more time with her and our daughter now. But she asked me "Can you really do that? If VP asks you again will you not go back"?

My wife realised the strength of bonds between Prabhakaran and myself. She used to talk to Prabhakaran's wife Madhivadhani on the phone those days and both knew about the close relationship between their husbands

Q: So how did the return occur? How and why did you re-join the movement? What was your role during the last days of the war?

A: That's another long story

Q:So how did the return occur? How and why did you re-join the movement?What was your role during the last days of the war?

That's another long story.

I was now out of the movement and leading a quiet life in Thailand with my family. I had no idea of returning to the movement though my wife felt that I would always go back if asked by Prabhakaran himself.

As for me I did not think that I would re-join because it is extremely rare for anyone being

recalled by the LTTE after his or her services were discontinued. Also I knew the extent to which some senior LTTE leaders had worked against me and poisoned Prabhakaran's mind against me.

But even though I was out of the LTTE I was always following the news about what was happening. Though I was out of the LTTE, I was getting worried as events unfolded because I could see from the news that the LTTE was not faring well.

The Tiger ships were getting knocked out at sea by the Sri Lankan navy. As the man who had kept the LTTE supplied, I knew how important it was for the LTTE to maintain supplies throughout by the sea. So I realized that the ships getting destroyed was a bad thing

Q: How did that happen? How did the Sri Lankan navy become so efficient in taking out so many Tiger vessels?

I think various Colombo governments over the years had gradually built up and modernized the Navy. They were also getting additional intelligence inputs from different countries. So the Navy at the time of the ceasefire had reached high levels of efficiency. The ceasefire conditions and rules were not clear about movement in the sea. So the Navy was able to move about freely and monitor LTTE ships

Q: Did not the LTTE anticipate this?

Prabhakaran did anticipate this. He told me in 2000 that in the coming years the outcome of the war would be decided at sea. He wanted to build up the Sea Tigers to greater levels and meet the challenge.

I don't know why but he seems to have changed plans later. The LTTE started to build up the fighters in the land and develop the air wing. Prabhakaran did not develop the LTTE's sea power as he had intended earlier.

On the other hand, the Navy was very active and strong. They put up a blockade around Lanka's territorial waters. The navy also went out to far off spots and destroyed LTTE ships at sea.

The combination of effective Intelligence about LTTE ship movements and increased efficiency of the Navy resulted in LTTE sea movement getting severely restricted. I was told later that no LTTE ships were able to bring stuff to the east coast from 2007 onwards. Soosai told me "not even a panadol."

Q:But did not this situation change after you re-joined the movement? There were reports in the media that the LTTE had been able to get two ships through in late 2008 and early 2009. It was believed that you were responsible.

No that is not correct. I did not send any ships through. In fact, I had not even tried to do that.

Q: I was under the impression that you had re-joined the movement to be in charge of sending supplies by sea and you had done that by sending two ships through?

It is correct that initially the LTTE wanted me to re-join in order to send supplies by sea. But I had clearly explained that it was not possible at short notice. I went back to the LTTE to help work out some ceasefire arrangement and stop the war and not to resume supplying by sea

Q:Before we talk about that matter, I want to ask you something bluntly. Some of your detractors blame you for the way in which LTTE ships were destroyed by the Navy. I have seen accusations against you in the Tamil media that you had pocketed the money given to buy arms and sent empty ships to Lanka and gave information to the Colombo govt and got the navy to destroy the ships.

Yes. I have seen the propaganda against me which you describe. This conspiracy theory shows the levels of imagination of some of our people.

Let me tell you clearly. I was out of the LTTE effectively from 2002 December. But the duty of handling the LTTE shipping fleet was taken away from me end of February 2002 as soon as the ceasefire came into place. It was brought under the Sea Tigers headed by Soosai.

I had nothing to do with the ships from that time. Then in December 2002 I was relieved of my duties of overseas purchasing (euphemism for arms procurement).The department known as KP dept was disbanded.

The arms procurement and transport responsibility was handled by Aiya and another called Ilankuttuvan. I had no knowledge of anything. I was not in charge of "kolvanavu" (purchasing). That being the real situation how could I have any information to pass on to the govt?

Q:But could you not have obtained info about ship movement from other LTTE cadres involved and passed it on? Some of your KP dept people with whom you would have some influence?

The LTTE works on a strict need to know basis. One unit does not know what the other does. So it would be impossible to get full info unless one contacted all the units involved.

As for my KP dept people almost all of them were recalled and given new duties or discontinued. So there was no way that I could get information from them.

One thing to note is that I too stopped talking to those involved in the work. Even when I got a friendly call once in a way I never asked about these matters.

I know the LTTE mentality very well. If I had even referred to these matters casually and then due to bad luck something drastic happened they would start suspecting me. So I never tried to get info about these matters from anyone.

You must remember that these types of accusations are being said only now by people who have no knowledge about how the LTTE works. There was no charge like this earlier when the LTTE leadership was there. If there had been any suspicion I would not have been approached by the LTTE or given a new role after re-joining.

Q:Yes. I think we have digressed a little. So please relate the circumstances of your re-joining the LTTE?

As I told you earlier, I was observing events and realized that the LTTE was getting into difficulties because the sea supplies were not getting through. But I was now out and could do nothing. Then in the latter part of 2008, Sea Tiger commander Soosai and senior military commander Sornam began calling me frequently.

They explained that the situation was getting bad and that sea supplies had to be restored. They said that only I could ensure resumption of sea supplies and appealed to me to re-join the movement and take charge of overseas purchasing again.

I was in a dilemma. Though I felt bad I was reluctant to get back again. I had been living quietly for many years and enjoying family life. Also I fully well knew the international situation. Earlier the LTTE was not on the global terrorist radar. We could discreetly purchase what we wanted from the arms bazaar's and ship them to the Island.

But now in a post – Sep 11th 2001 situation it was not so easy. I doubted very much whether even I could do what was expected of me. Besides I was out of touch for five years and needed time to set up things again. So I did not give them a word.

But then on December 31st 2008 everything changed.

Q:What happened on that day?

Prabhakaran called me and had a very very long conversation. He told me of the military situation in very frank terms. When he called me on Dec 31st Kilinochchi had not fallen but Prabhakaran said it would fall very soon. He then said that the fighting would shift east of the A-9 road afterwards.

Prabhakaran was optimistic that the LTTE would be able to hold on to a piece of territory with access to the coast for a long time. But he knew it could not be for ever and ever. Meanwhile he wanted me to re-join the movement and start purchasing and transporting supplies again.

When Prabhakaran asked me directly I could not say no. I agreed to re-join the LTTE but told him that my immediate goal would be to bring about a ceasefire and not resumption of supplies.

Q: Why did you say this and how did he respond?

I explained to him that the international situation had changed drastically. Intelligence agencies of many countries in the west particularly the US were swarming on areas of potential arms sales. Maritime movement was being monitored very strictly. Unlike the earlier days it would require much effort and preparation to resume sea supply effectively

I also told him that my KP dept network had been dismantled. I was out of touch and lost most contacts. Also I was being closely watched. So if I was to resume arms procurement I needed time to start work clandestinely and set up the network again. I told Prabhakaran, I needed at least one year to get things going. He said that may perhaps be too late.

In that case I suggested that the LTTE should go in for a ceasefire. Earlier in 1989 when the Indian army was strangulating the LTTE, Bala annai had played a crucial role and brought about an understanding with the Premadasa govt. I too had a supportive role in this.

Now Bala annai was no more. Prabhakaran said that I must spearhead the task of bringing about a ceasefire and getting the LTTE a respite. He wanted me to commence talks with whoever necessary and bring about a ceasefire.

I then said I must be given a relevant position so that I could represent the LTTE officially and that I should get full cooperation from the LTTE overseas branches. Prabhakaran agreed and so when 2009 dawned I was back in the LTTE again.

Q: So you came back to the LTTE to coordinate and lead efforts to bring about a ceasefire? How did you go about it? Did you get the backing of the overseas Tiger structure?

I was made the head of International relations in the LTTE. I was tasked to interact and negotiate with international actors and somehow bring about a ceasefire. The overseas branches were instructed to support me fully in my efforts.

Since Castro and I were not on good terms the Political commissar Nadesan was to be my link with the leader in these matters. Nadesan was to coordinate with Castro about issues concerning me.

But things were not easy or rosy. Even though I started work from January first week in 2009, the announcement about my appointment was delayed. Castro took a long time to convey it to the overseas branches. The "Tamilnet" delayed carrying a news item. The overseas Tamil media under Nediyan's control blacked me out.

Through Nadesan and the political wing, I got overseas branches to organize demonstrations highlighting the civilian plight and demanding a ceasefire. I specifically asked them to demonstrate without any symbols of the LTTE and make it a non-partisan humanitarian exercise.

There were many demonstrations and we were getting a positive response. But within weeks Castro gave instructions through Nediyan that the demonstrators should carry LTTE flags and Prabhakaran's portrait. Placards were shown asking the international community to remove the ban on the LTTE and recognize it as the sole representatives of Tamils.

When I tried to stop that I was portrayed as being against Prabhakaran. As a result of this political stupidity we had massive demonstrations without any results because they were seen as pro –LTTE and not pro-People demonstrations.

Q:In such a situation where Castro's people were sabotaging you, how did you carry out your duties as LTTE international relations chief?

The way in which the overseas branches started sabotaging my work was terrible. They would not cooperate. I was not given sufficient funds. When I tried to get some funds from the branches it was refused. So I had to rely on my own funds and funds from supporters and LTTE associates in a personal capacity. I also had to set up my own staff and network by appealing to the old loyalists many of whom were now "retired". These people rallied around me in a wonderful way

Q:But why did you not complain to Prabhakaran and rectify the situation?

I did and sent messages to him but with 2009 the military situation had changed. The army was rapidly advancing. Prabhakaran's personal security was threatened. So he had to maintain a low profile. Also without Velu, my earlier contact-link with Prabhakaran, communicating with the leader was difficult. The new guys were not very efficient or helpful in these matters. Nadesan also was hesitant to complain about Castro. Both had a good relationship.

Besides with the war hotting up I was also reluctant to pressure Prabhakaran continuously on these matters. I was also doubtful whether even Prabhakaran could have changed the situation. The Castro group was well-entrenched abroad. His deputy Nediyan was running things. They knew how to delay or scuttle matters.

Q:I want to clarify something. I hope you will give me a candid answer. Was this peace initiative to bring about a ceasefire a time –buying exercise? Were you striving for a ceasefire on the one hand and trying to buy arms and ship them on the other?

My answer is NO.

I do not know about others in the LTTE leadership. Some may have thought of using it as a ploy but I was sincere and serious about a ceasefire. I was genuinely trying for one because I knew the LTTE was doomed if the war continued and I wanted to save the life of the people, Prabhakaran, my other comrades and the young fighters of the movement.

I did not play a double game of trying to negotiate peace and acquire arms at the same time. I believe in doing whatever task at hand with sincerity and without deception. If I were to try hard for a ceasefire openly and at the same time try to transport arms clandestinely it would be dishonest. I have to give my 100 per cent to peacemaking and nothing else.

Also look at it this way. If I were found out or if international players helping me for a ceasefire got information that I was shipping arms then my credibility would have been lost. Trust in me and the intentions of the LTTE would have been destroyed. Just imagine the Sri Lankan government's position if it was discovered that I was playing a double game? All chances of a

ceasefire would have been lost forever.

Q: Did this mean that the LTTE was not trying to ferry arms while you were working towards a ceasefire?

What I can say is that I was not doing or trying to do anything of the sort. But others may have been trying. You see with arms procurement and transport becoming difficult Prabhakaran had delegated such duties to some other divisions also. While Aiya was in charge of arms procurement the intelligence division under Pottu Amman, the international affairs division under Castro and Sea Tigers under Soosai were also delegated arms procurement duties. The situation was so desperate that Prabhakaran had put all these actors on to this stage. But still no progress was made.

Q: It looks like a case of too many cooks spoiling the soup. Do you think that you may have never let this situation develop had you been in charge all along?

Well I must say that arms procurement is not a simple thing like buying things over a counter. It is because of inexperienced eager people being entrusted with this task that some arrests were made like in Canada and the USA.

When Soosai, Sornam and later Prabhakaran spoke to me they did say that it was a mistake to have removed me from arms procurement and that these problems would not have occurred if I was in charge.

Though I was happy to hear that I doubt whether I could have managed to succeed under changed circumstances. With powerful countries monitoring movements like us in the global war against terrorism and the performance of a highly improved navy, I too may have found it difficult to procure and transport arms as required.

Q: Again let me ask you – were you trying for a ceasefire only to save the LTTE or was your commitment to peace deeper and really genuine?

I am glad you asked me this because I can speak openly about my change of heart. It was a slow process.

The time that I was out of the LTTE and leading a quiet life gave me time to give deep thought and reflect on things. I was also able to observe the world being transformed in the aftermath of September 11th 2001. Earlier they used to say one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter. Now they were saying there is no good or bad terrorist. All are terrorists.

I realized that a movement like the LTTE could not continue to fight and survive in a changing environment. The whole world will gang up against us. Also after decades of conflict the Tamil people were suffering. They needed peace.

So I really thought we must negotiate and reach a political settlement. Bala annai and I were of the same mind in this. I tried to convince Prabhakaran also of this. He then said to negotiate we

must have a ceasefire first. So I began working earnestly for a ceasefire as a first step for a negotiated peace

Q:But were you really hopeful of a ceasefire? Were you not fighting a lost battle? Looking back with the wisdom of hindsight what do you think?

At that time I was really hopeful about a ceasefire. I knew that somehow a ceasefire had to be brought about to save the lives of the LTTE leaders, cadres and innocent civilians caught in the middle.

Q:Did you not try to save the civilians by getting the LTTE to release them?

I did try at the start.

There was even an offer by the Americans to transport them by sea to Trincomalee. But the LTTE hierarchy was not agreeable. This attitude was most unfortunate and may appear as inhuman. I am not trying to condone or justify this action but when I reflect upon the past I think the LTTE leadership also had no choice. If they released the people first, then only the Tigers would be left there. Thereafter all of them could have been wiped out.

Q:Mao Ze Dong's famous dictum about guerillas being the fish swimming in an ocean of people. If the ocean was drained the fish would flounder. So the fish wanted to retain the water?

Exactly. That is why I tried for a ceasefire so that everyone, the people and the fighters could be saved. But looking back now I think the LTTE leadership was too late in trying for a ceasefire. Had we tried in mid 2008 when the fighting was on the west of the A -9 highway there was a good chance of working out an agreement

But after Poonagary, Paranthan, Kilinochchi and Elephant pass fell the prospects of victory were imminent for the government. The pace of events was too fast. From their point of view, with outright victory in sight, it would have been stupid to go in for a ceasefire.

Q:Under these circumstances what did you do? What could you achieve?

I am essentially a worker. If given a responsibility I start doing it instead of finding reasons for not doing it. Also in this case it was a matter of life and death. I had to somehow work out a ceasefire and save the people, movement and leadership. So with the meagre funds at my disposal and the support of like-minded people I commenced my work. I was in touch with international political leaders, top bureaucrats, diplomats, opinion-makers of different countries and also high –ranking UN officials. I contacted some of them directly. Influential people contacted some others on my behalf.

In March 2009 I thought I had made a breakthrough but sadly Prabhakaran rejected the proposal.

Q:Was this the “lock-off” plan that was rejected by Prabhakaran in just three words? Could you elaborate please?

Well, Yes. I had a tentative plan with international endorsement. The LTTE was to lay down arms by hoarding them in specific locations. The words used were “lock –off”. That is arms particularly heavy weapons were to be locked off in specific places.

They were to be handed over to representatives of the UN. Afterwards there was to be a cessation of hostilities in which the people were to be kept in specific “no firing zones”. Negotiations were to be conducted between the Govt. and LTTE with Norwegian facilitation.

Tentatively about 25 to 50 top leaders with their families were to be transported to a foreign country if necessary. The middle level leaders and cadres were to be detained, charged in courts and given relatively minor sentences. The low-level junior cadres were to be given a general amnesty.

The scheme was to endorsed by the west including Norway, EU and the USA. The Americans were ready to send their naval fleet in to do evacuation if necessary

Q:Was the Sri Lankan government agreeable?

I don't think there was any official intimation to Colombo but maybe they were sounded out informally. But the plan was never concretized because the main man concerned, Prabhakaran rejected it.

I had written an outline of the plan and sent it to him for approval. If he said “Proceed” I would have concretized it and started work on implementing it. But when I faxed the details in a 16-page memorandum he rejected the 16 pages in just three words “Ithai Etrukkolla Mudiyaathu”(This is unacceptable) So. I had to drop it.

Q:Even if Prabhakaran had agreed to it, do you think the Govt would have complied given the fact that the armed forces were on the verge of annihilating the LTTE?

I don't know. Most probably the Govt may not have obliged because it was on the verge of victory and would not have wanted to be deprived of it. But the point is that it was never concretized and submitted to the Govt. Given the situation the LTTE was in, Prabhakaran should have taken it.

Q:Why did Prabhakaran reject it then?

I don't know I can only guess. It is too painful to dwell on it because he is no more and I will always be thinking “why didn't he accept this opportunity”?

Q:But your attempts to save Prabhakaran did not stop did it? There was some talk of a helicopter rescue attempt?

Yes. That was another plan but that too did not materialize because of the non – cooperation of Nediyan and his cohorts abroad. Whenever I think of the fate that befell Prabhakaran's family I grieve and then silently curse Nediyan and his people.

Q:Do you think you can relate what happened if it is not too painful for you or you think that it needs to be told?

It is painful but I do think our people must know the truth about this matter. Maybe speaking about it may give me emotional relief.

What happened was that in early May 2009, Prabhakaran's eldest son Charles Anthony called me frantically. He calls me "KP Mama" or KP Uncle. Charles said that the situation was getting very bad and that I should somehow arrange to get his father, mother, sister and younger brother out to safety.

Q:What about Charles himself?

No he did not want to escape. Charles said he was ready to fight to the last and die if necessary. It was his family he was worried about.

I was very upset after talking to Charles. So I thought of a plan. I wanted to charter a ship and keep it ready in international waters way beyond the reach of the Sri Lankan navy. I wanted to buy a helicopter and get some of the trained LTTE air-wing pilots to fly it into the Wanniyarua and pick up the family and bring them to the ship. Thereafter I had plans of keeping them safe in one of three countries.

Q:But would Prabhakaran have agreed to this?

I am not sure but after I had formulated a plan I got in touch with Charles and told him. I asked him whether his father would agree. Charles said he will try and make Prabhakaran agree but if he would not agree, I was to save his mother and two younger siblings. Knowing Prabhakaran I felt he would never try to escape with his family ,leaving others behind. But I thought the helicopter could take him and some others to a jungle somewhere first and land him safely. Then the helicopter could fly out with Madhivadhani, Duwaraga and Balachandran.

Q:What happened finally? Why did the plan not take off?

It's a very sad story.

Q: What happened finally to your plan of rescuing Prabhakaran and his family by helicopter? Why did the plan not take off?

It's a very sad story

After Prabhakaran's son Charles Anthony asked me to rescue his family members by air I devised a plan and made preliminary arrangements. I arranged for a ship to be kept waiting at a far –off port beyond the reach of the Sri Lanka navy. I also made arrangements to buy a

second-hand helicopter from an Ukrainian contact.

The idea was for one or two trained pilots from the LTTE's airwing "Vaan Puligal" to fly into the Wannu. If Prabhakaran was willing, the family except for Charles Anthony were to be flown out. If the leader was unwilling then he and a few other of his bodyguards and senior leaders were to be flown by the copter and dropped off in a jungle location in Lanka.

Afterwards the heli would fly out to the ship with Prabhakaran's wife Madhivadhani, daughter Thuwaraga and younger son Balachandran and perhaps a few others. I would be waiting for them at the ship. Thereafter I planned to keep the family safely in one of three countries. Perhaps in rotation.

Q: Were these countries ready to accept the family? Were they western nations?

No, they were not countries in the west. Two were in Africa and one in Asia. I had been in touch with senior govt officials of these countries through my representatives. When I had sounded them out on this matter they were willing.

Q: The plan itself was rather risky? Were you confident of it succeeding?

Yes, it was risky but I was ready to carry it out. We had no choice. If we didn't risk it, the alternative was certain death. I also had a secret hope that Prabhakaran may agree at the last minute and opt to fly out. So I devised the plan. The key element was surprise. If the first stage was successful we may have tried further flights too to rescue others.

Q: But then what went wrong?

It never worked out. It required about 3.5 million US dollars to implement the plan. I did not have that kind of money. The LTTE overseas structure had to give me the money. Castro had promised Charles Anthony that Nediyanan in Norway will transfer the necessary funds to me. But he never did it.

I made repeated requests that it was urgent and time was running out. I would be told, "the money is coming, money is coming". But sadly it never came.

Also Nediyanan was in touch with Atchuthan the Air wing chief living abroad. Earlier he had agreed to provide the required LTTE pilots for the operation. But then suddenly acting perhaps under Nediyanan's orders he stopped communicating with me. I was really frantic. I approached mercenary pilots to fly the helicopter but nothing further could be done without necessary funds.

And then in mid-May the Sri Lankan army launched a three-pronged offensive and boxed off the Valainjermadam- Mullivaaiikkal- Vattuvaahal area. After that it was too late to attempt a helicopter rescue. So with great sorrow I abandoned the plan. I was furious with Nediyanan and Castro but helpless to do anything.

Q: And within days all were dead?

Yes. They were all dead. The whole family was gone. I was extremely sad at Balachandran's death. He was only 12 years old. I had never seen the boy in person but when he was a child I used to talk to Prabhakaran frequently. This boy would be on his lap and Prabhakaran would often give the phone to him saying "Intha KP Mamavode kathai"(Here, talk to KP uncle) So I would chat with him. Later I lost touch with the boy but I was apparently still existing in his memory.

When the war escalated and shelling increased the boy was very frightened. Later when Charles asked me to arrange for an aerial rescue and I started working on the plan , young Balachandran had been told not to worry and that he would be going to KP uncle soon. The little fellow had then put some of his belongings in a small bag and had been carrying it around with him all the time saying "Naan KP Mamata poren." (I am going to KP uncle)

Sometimes in my thoughts, I visualize Balachandran with his bag telling people that he was going to KP Mama and waiting for a rescue that never took place. When I think of that I get so sad and angry at Nediyan for obstructing the plan.

Q: Why did he do that?

I really don't know but it must have been on Castro's instructions. They did not want KP to get credit I think. But this was really a symptom of what had gone wrong in the LTTE. Individuals were letting their petty jealousies and divisions affect the overall good of the movement and struggle.

Q: You are sure about the entire family being killed? There are stories spread by sections of the Tamil Diaspora and Tamil Nadu politicians that Prabhakaran is alive and Madhivathani is alive and so on? What do you say?

These types of tales are spread by some for their selfish motives and others believe them because they don't want to accept emotionally that it is over.

Q: But you don't have first –hand knowledge of this?

Obviously no! But I was in touch with Soosai till the last stages. I have also heard about these matters from official sources. Most importantly I saw Prabhakaran's body on TV.

Q: But these people disputing it say it was not his body?

Utter nonsense. When I saw the TV image I immediately knew it was Prabhakaran. I was so upset that I cut myself off from people and spent hours alone crying, reflecting and meditating.

Q: One of the reasons for this confusion was due to yourself also. When Prabhakaran's death reports surfaced you announced to the media that it was not so and that he was alive in a safe location. Subsequently you went back on that denial. This action eroded your credibility greatly and provides ammunition to your critics. Why this flip-flop? Can you explain?

Yes, I will be happy to explain. What happened was that Prabhakaran ,Pottu Amman and some others broke out clandestinely in one group and moved through the lagoon and coast. Two other groups also moved out in different directions. The idea was to reach the jungles safely.

Reconnaissance missions done earlier showed that the soldiers were in three layers around the encircled area. Soosai with whom I was interacting was informed that Praba and Pottu had broken through all three layers. After that there was no communication. We both assumed that the leader had reached a safe place and predictably cut off communication to avoid being monitored. It was after this that I issued the statement about silencing our arms. I did this in consultation with Soosai. I was using this statement as a basis to accelerate peace initiatives and come to an arrangement where the remaining people could be saved. Nadesan and Pulidevan from another location were also engaged in negotiations. It was the earlier, information received by me that Prabhakaran had broken through the military layers that gave me the belief that he had reached safety. It was this confidence that made me dismiss reports of Prabhakaran's death and state that he was safe. Also the first media report about Prabhakaran being dead was in relation to the ambulance escape. That report was false. Prabhakaran was not in an ambulance

But shortly before I lost contact with Soosai the sea Tiger chief surprised me by saying that Prabhakaran could not break through and had returned. Soosai said that he was only a few hundred yards away from the place he was in. Soosai said that the break out attempt had failed and Prabhakaran had returned without Pottu Amman. He could not give me any more information other than that ,except to say the fighting was really fierce. A little later I lost contact with Soosai.

Some time later I saw Prabhakaran's body on TV and immediately realised it was all over.

But I must emphasize that my earlier statement denying Prabhakaran's death and subsequent statement confirming it were both given with all honesty. I did not intend to mislead anyone. I made them on the basis of the information available at that time. People must remember that fighting was going on and communication was difficult. They say "Porin moodupani"(fog of war) about war situations where people get wrong information about the situation.

Q: Yes. I think the term "fog of war" was first used by Clausewitz and recently made famous by Robert Mcnamara. But tell me how did Prabhakaran die? Do you know?

You understand that I was not there and must rely on what I heard or was told. On Prabhakaran's death the information I got was that he and a group of 60 Tigers were trapped in a strip of land adjacent to Nandhikkadal lagoon. They had all fought to the very end and died in battle.

Q: What about the stories about Prabhakaran surrendering and being shot after being humiliated?

No that never happened. If I know anything about Prabhakaran he would never ever have surrendered. I know the stories being spread . Some do so deliberately. Some simply repeat what they hear without thinking.

I know reliably that a senior TNA leader went around saying that Prabhakaran had surrendered and was brought to Sarath Fonseka who made the LTTE leader kneel down and then shot him. Nonsense! I can't understand why a veteran Tamil leader who used to cringe before Prabhakaran should speak about him this way after death.

But the army people who defeated Prabhakaran speak highly of him and the way in which he died. Top persons in the defence establishment –I think you understand who I am referring to – told me that they had been very impressed by the courageous way in which this group had fought to the very end and died without surrendering. But some of our people are insulting Prabhakaran after his death. I want to reiterate that my leader fought to the very end and had a “Veera maranam”(heroic death)

Q: I have heard that during the Indian army period Prabhakaran had a bodyguard who carried a plastic can of petrol. His orders were to burn Prabhakaran's body if he was killed so that the enemy should not get hold of it. But, this time that does not seem to have been done. What happened?

I heard he had similar preparations this time too. For Prabhakaran it was very important that his body should be disposed of without others getting hold of it. What I think is that the petrol can may have fallen into the water or maybe the fighter entrusted with the duty was killed before Prabhakaran. I am only guessing I really don't know.

Q: What about Pottu Amman? What do you think happened to him?

Since Prabhakaran and Pottu broke out together and Prabhakaran came back alone I presume that Pottu had died in the escape attempt. Otherwise he would have been at Prabhakaran's side. Since the army is very sure that Pottu's body was not recovered I am assuming that Prabhakaran himself would have got Pottu's body destroyed to ensure it did not get into army hands.

Q: There is also the possibility that Pottu escaped?

As an argument yes! But realistically no!

The people who say Prabhakaran and Pottu are alive and would surface some years later are only insulting and disgracing their memory. Those who keep up this ridiculous claim must produce Prabhakaran and Pottu without uttering stupid nonsense.

Q: Another point I want to ask you is about Prabhakaran's body. I expected Prabhakaran's family members to demand that Prabhakaran's body be handed over to them and for the overseas Tigers to organize a final farewell to the man who dedicated himself to the cause he espoused for nearly 40 years.

I thought as you did at that time and obtained legal and diplomatic advice.

I was told that if Prabhakaran's siblings would make a request that their brother's body be

handed over to them international pressure could be exerted on Colombo in that respect.

So I got in touch with Prabhakaran's brother and one of his two sisters to ask them to make such a demand. I was rebuffed. In fact his sister's husband snatched the phone from his wife while I was talking and rudely hung up on me after telling me not to call again. So there was nothing I could do and in the meantime the govt. announced that his body was cremated and ashes scattered in the sea. That was that.

Q: So Prabhakaran died in battle. What about the rest of the family? What happened?

According to the information I have, the wife Madhivadhani was killed in the shelling. I believe it happened before Prabhakaran made his break –out attempt.

Charles Anthony was injured in the fighting earlier but he continued to lead cadres in a last ditch stand. As I told you earlier he did not want to escape and died fighting.

Another thing in this is that Kuga the widow of Sornalingam alias Shankar(killed on Sep 27th 2001) remained with Charles and died along with him. Kuga was a close friend of Madhivadhani and had promised her that she would always be with Charles and be like a mother to him. She refused to leave with other wives and widows and remained with Charles.

The daughter Thuubaraga also fought and died on the battlefield. I hear she died on May 14th.

As for the youngest kid Balachandran I am a bit puzzled. He would have remained close to his mother and so would have died in the shelling along with his mother. But the pictures I saw on the internet of a dead Balachandran did not indicate he had been killed in the shelling. So there is some confusion in this.

Q: Prabhakaran and the family being killed in this way must have been a terrible blow to you. I think you were his "Maapillai Tholan"(best Man) at his wedding. Why did you perform this role among all his senior deputies and commanders?

Yes. I have been close to him and the family. Their loss is a huge, personal loss. My inability to help them or save them will be a permanent source of grief to me.

You asked me about being the Groom's friend at the wedding. There was a reason for it. When Prabhakaran fell in love with Madhivadhani and wanted to marry her most of the senior leaders and commanders were not in favour. They were opposed to it on the grounds that it would affect the movement.

At that stage Prabhakaran turned to me. He was very shy to tell me about this due to another happening in the past. You see when I joined the LTTE I was also romancing a girl. But

Prabhakaran asked me to end the love affair saying a revolutionary should not be involved in a romance. With great reluctance, I obeyed him and ended my love then.

Now the situation had changed and Prabhakaran was in love and asking my help. No wonder he was feeling awkward. But I immediately supported him and encouraged him to go ahead with the marriage. I personally spoke to several senior leaders and made them change their mind. It was I who met Prabhakaran's father and informed him of his son's matrimonial plan.. It is because of this reason that I played the best man role at the wedding

Q: Even after the wedding you were close to him and the family?

Yes. Though I spent most of the time outside I was in constant touch with Prabhakaran those days. I used to talk to the children and wife also. After I got married my wife and Madhivadhani used to converse with each other on the phone.

I also used to send personal gifts to each member of the family along with the stuff I used to ship to Lanka.

During the Indian army period when Prabhakaran had to go to the Wannu jungles his wife Madhivadhani was finding it difficult to cope with two young children. Prabhakaran wanted to send them to a safe place for a while. He wanted to send them to an old comrade "Singam" living in Sweden.

They were brought by boat to India. Thereafter I arranged for travel documents and got them sent to Scandinavia. Later we found that Prabhakaran's friend was having some problems and finding it difficult to accommodate Madhi and the children

So I took the risk of travelling to Sweden on false papers and transported the mother and children to Denmark. I arranged for safe accommodation there.

Q: With her family members?

No not with them. They were reluctant. This was elsewhere with some others.

Then came the talks with the Premadasa Govt in 1989. I used the opportunity to get proper travel documents and went to Scandinavia from where I personally escorted the mother and kids to Colombo. I took them to the Wannu and handed them over to Prabhakaran saying I have brought your family home safely. He was very very happy.

When I think of that time where I transported the family safely and of the present time where I could not help them I feel very ,very sad. Those days both son and daughter were fond of me and I used to carry them frequently.

Q: Yes I recall seeing pictures those days of you carrying Charles.

On the question of Charles Anthony and his sister Thubaraga , there were media reports that they were studying in Britain and Ireland. What happened? When did they return and why?

No, no, no! They were never abroad for studies. That's all false.

Q: Then?

You see both children were very clever and could have done very well in higher studies. The mother Madhivadhani was very keen about it. When Bala annai and Adele Aunty came out of the Wannai in 1999, Madhivadhani sent a request to me that I should make arrangements for the children's higher studies abroad.

So I took some time and made careful preparations. I made foolproof arrangements where both could come abroad and commence higher studies in a very safe environment without their identity being revealed. Madhivadhani was very happy.

But the father Prabhakaran changed his mind after agreeing to it initially. He simply refused to let the children go. Madhivadhani could not make him change his stance. So that was that. They never came abroad for higher studies. Later both joined the movement voluntarily and became trained fighters

Q: Why did Prabhakaran adopt this position?

I suppose it was due to his principles. He felt it was not correct for him to send his children abroad to safety and higher studies when the children of other people had to remain in the Wannai. It was the same principle that made him encourage the son and daughter to join the movement. Again he felt that he could not keep his children safely at home when the children of other people were fighting.

Q: Thank you for shedding some light on this issue. It appears that we have been misinformed about the actual situation.

However why is it that deliberate attempts are on to spread misinformation and disinformation about Prabhakaran's demise? Why is there a divergence on this matter between you and Nediyan?

At the start the refusal to accept the truth was emotional. For instance, when I issued the statement about Prabhakaran being dead, an activist belonging to the intelligence wing –Kathirgamathamby Arivazhagan – issued a statement contradicting it. But later he realised the truth and issued another statement accepting that Prabhakaran was no more. In the case of Nediyan and those around him they may have had doubts at the start. But now they know fully well that Prabhakaran is dead. However they are deliberately refusing to accept it publicly and are spreading stories that Prabhakaran is alive and that the armed struggle to achieve Tamil Eelam continues. The pronouncements of Tamil Nadu leaders who say we must fight and get Tamil Eelam and present it to Prabhakaran when he appears helps in this false propaganda.

Q: What is NEDIYAVAN's motive in projecting this false impression about Prabhakaran being alive?

Money! Everything is money now. When I issued a statement about Prabhakaran being dead they started opposing it saying the leader was alive. When I planned to pay homage to Prabhakaran and other senior leaders they blocked it. Earlier I thought they were genuine in this belief about Prabhakaran being alive but later I discovered that they knew the truth but were pretending.

Q: How was that?

You see, after some time I began negotiating with NEDIYAVAN in a bid to patch up our differences and establish unity. One of the matters I was firm about was that we should acknowledge Prabhakaran's death and conduct a week of mourning. Then NEDIYAVAN said that we should never acknowledge Prabhakaran's death publicly because the movement would not be able to collect money from the Diaspora after that.

I then told him that we cannot run a movement on lies and falsehoods. Besides we would be ungrateful people if we could not pay tribute to the leader who had fought unceasingly for the Tamil cause all these years

I also pointed out that Prabhakaran was the "Aathmaa" (Soul) of our struggle. Without him there was no struggle, no movement or no Tamil Eelam. I said that we needed large amounts of money only to buy arms. With the armed struggle over, we did not need such huge amounts. I said that the businesses we were operating abroad and small donations from our committed supporters were enough to run the movement.

I also said our new task was not to conduct a war but to help our people. The immediate goal was to secure the release of LTTE members in custody and rehabilitate them. The other was to get our displaced Tamils released and resettled.

NEDIYAVAN reluctantly agreed and we established unity resulting in myself becoming the leader in a re-structured LTTE. This was in July 2009. I was the chief secretary and NEDIYAVAN the secretary in charge of overseas branch administration. It was agreed to commemorate Prabhakaran's death during the great heroes week of November.

But then I was seized within weeks on August 5th and brought to Colombo. With that everything collapsed and NEDIYAVAN got the upper hand. So Prabhakaran's death was not acknowledged and the myth of him being alive is kept alive still.

Q: You said earlier that money plays a big part in this myth being perpetuated. I think I can guess why and how. But could you elaborate please?

During the last few months of the war, a massive special collection was conducted among the Diaspora. Not even a cent went to the war effort. That money is controlled by NEDIYAVAN and his cohorts. There are also numerous money-making concerns either run directly or being financed by the LTTE. All this is big money. There is also an amount collected on behalf of the

TRO(Tamil Rehabilitation Organization)

If Nediyan and his people are to retain control of this cash and businesses and also raise more funds in the future they need to stage the drama that the armed struggle is not over and Tamil Eelam is just there at the junction. For that the big lie about Prabhakaran being alive must be maintained because our people know that without Prabhakaran there can never be a victorious armed struggle in our lifetime.

But this cant go on forever.Gradually the truth will be realised by all and Nediyan will be exposed.

Q: This explains the puerile politics of Nediyan and his cabal. But why are Tamil Nadu politicians like Nedumaran and Vaiko (V.Gopalaswamy) also saying that Prabhakaran is alive?Do they really believe it? A: No. They also know the truth but they too have links to the overseas LTTE now controlled by Nediyan. Also their politics has been around the image that the LTTE is invincible and Prabhakaran is immortal. So they have to keep on saying Prabhakaran is alive and Tamil Eelam will bloom.

Q: Have you not tried to convince people like Nedumaran and Vaiko?

Last year before I was caught I did telephone Nedumaran and spoke for a very long time explaining the position. He then told me to get the LTTE's central working committee to pass a resolution saying Prabhakaran was dead. How could I do that? All the leaders were dead or missing or in custody.

Then this man Nedumaran did another dirty thing along with Vaiko. They issued a statement saying Prabhakaran was alive and that KP was an agent of the Indian spy agency RAW.

After that, I stopped trying to talk to them. I did not speak to Vaiko but I know reliably that he knows Prabhakaran is no more. When told of the death in private Vaiko "kulungi Aluthar" (shaken and cried) But in public he maintains the lie of Prabhakaran being alive. No amount of secret weeping by Vaiko can take away his guilt in the downfall of the LTTE..It was he who spoiled chances of an India sponsored ceasefire

Q: What do you mean? What did Vaiko do or not do in this matter?

While I was trying to bring about a ceasefire on one side the political commissar Nadesan (Balasingham Mahendran) was also trying for one. At one stage pro-LTTE sympathizers in the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) like chief minister Karunanidhi's daughter and Rajya Sabha MP, Kanimozhi along with the Catholic priest Fr. Jegath Gaspar Raj had been negotiating with Central govt minister P.Chidambaram about a possible ceasefire.

With Indian Parliamentary elections being held and AIADMK Leader Jayalalitha taking up a pro-LTTE stance the DMK-Congress combine was getting worried about losing. So Chidambaram came up with an idea. He wanted the LTTE to issue a unilateral statement with two main points.One was to agree to silence arms and surrender them in due course..The other was to accept a political settlement as an alternative to Tamil Eelam.

What I heard was that Chidambaram himself had “unofficially” drafted the statement for the LTTE to release under its name. The guarantee given was that New Delhi would exert pressure on Colombo when the statement was released and bring about a ceasefire pending negotiations.

Though Nadesan had been advised not to leak details of the move to people like Nedumaran and Vaiko, he had at one point of time consulted K.Mahendran the Tamil Nadu legislator from CPI(Marxist).. The CPM was an election ally with Vaiko’s MDMK in the AIADMK led alliance. Mahendran had leaked details of the plan to Vaiko.

Both were worried that the Congress and DMK would get the credit for a ceasefire and do well in the elections. So they wanted to sabotage it. Vaiko then got angry at the LTTE and warned Nadesan that if the Tigers opted for an alternative to Tamil Eelam then the MDMK and other Tamil Nadu parties supportive of the LTTE would permanently withdraw their support to the LTTE.

Nadesan was given the false hope that the AIADMK led alliance will sweep the seats in Tamil Nadu and the BJP will form the govt in New Delhi. Then pressure could be put on Colombo for a ceasefire. Any ceasefire before elections could help the DMK –Congress.

So, this man Nadesan abandoned the idea of releasing a statement. Chidambaram could do nothing. All because of Vaiko. They were so selfish that they prevented a possible ceasefire thinking they will do well at the polls.

Q: But even if they had issued such a statement do you think Colombo could have been forced to agree to a ceasefire at that stage when the defeat of the LTTE was imminent? On the other hand even if the BJP won and AIADMK alliance swept the polls in Tamil Nadu things on the ground in Lanka could not have been changed overnight. Given the speedy progress of the Army things would have been over long before India moved even if it wanted to?

I agree. But what I am saying is that even the chance of attempting a ceasefire through Indian help was spoiled at the start itself by this man Vaiko. A selfish politician who let the LTTE be sacrificed for his election ambition. Now he is shedding crocodile tears for Prabhakaran in private and publicly talking of another Eelam war. How long will these fellows grind chilly on our heads?

Q: Thank you for relating in detail about these important events of the recent past. Your input provides fresh insight into these matters. But now I want to ask you about the present.

Let me start with your relationship with this government particularly the Defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa. You have already told me about your arrest and your first meeting with the Defence Secretary. Its obvious that both of you have established good rapport.

Q: But there are lots of allegations about this. Several opposition leaders and sections of the media have alleged that there is some kind of shady deal between. What do you have to say?

My answer is just the truth. It really is a simple story...

QUESTION: Thank you for relating these details about these important events of the recent past. Your input provides fresh insight into these matters. But now I want to ask you about the present.

Let me start with your relationship with this government particularly the Defence secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse. You have already told me about your arrest and your first meeting with the defence secretary. It's obvious that both of you have established good rapport. But there are lots of allegations about this. Several opposition leaders and sections of the media have alleged that there is some kind of shady deal in between . What do you have to say?

ANSWER: My answer is just the truth. It really is a simple story..... There is no deal of any kind. There is only an understanding. A genuine understanding. Both of us have some common objectives. So we are working together to achieve those goals. That is our point of agreement. Nothing else.

Q: Could you elaborate further please? What exactly is this meeting point?

A: The war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam(LTTE) is now over. The Defence secretary Mr.Gotabhaya Rajapakse who coordinated and planned the war effort is now engaged in a different role. The Defence secretary has to maintain peace and prevent any possible eruption of violence again. Both he and the Govt of President Mahinda Rajapakse realise that much has to be done to resolve the problems caused by the war. There are a large number of former LTTE cadres in custody. The Internally displaced persons (IDP) being re-settled have to be rehabilitated and normalcy restored.The President and his brothers want to address these issues.

At the same time I am also concerned about these issues. I too want to see the boys and girls released as early as possible. I want them to be given a fresh start in life. I want the IDP returnees resettled and rehabilitated. So there is agreement between us in these matters. The Defence secretary has provided an opportunity for me to get involved in these matters to a certain extent and do what I can. This is our meeting point or area of agreement.

Q: But the question puzzling many is why you the former head of the re-structured LTTE is being given a chance to get involved in these matters?

A: I think the best person to answer this question is the Defence secretary himself or some responsible government minister or official. I can only answer from my perspective or what I think is behind the Government's thinking...

Q: Please do. Tell me why you think you are being given this opportunity?

A: What I think is that they have a tricky dilemma. They want to release,rehabilitate and resettle detenués and IDP's as soon as possible. The longer they delay the greater the international criticism.

But on the other side they are also cautious about the security angle. They don't want these released and resettled people to be used by interested parties for anything in the future that could result in the separatist demand being raised again or an outbreak of political violence.

Because of this the government authorities are very careful. This has resulted in matters moving slowly. This slow pace also results in the govt getting criticised.

So the govt is looking out for ways to help them address these matters faster and also ensure security interests are met. It is here that I come in I think. They are giving me a chance to play a small role in these matters like the squirrel in the "Ramayana" who helped build a dam across the sea. This gives me an opportunity to do something meaningful in my life. So I am very happy and glad.

Q: But why you? Why not some NGO or group of NGO's? Why not the Tamil parties aligned with the government?

A: You asked me about NGO's and Tamil parties and why they are not being given a role. Again I can only say what I think from what I have heard.

What I feel is that the govt does not trust most NGO's due to bad experiences in the past. This is why I think only limited access is given to many NGO's.

They are also very disappointed with some Tamil parties who abused and misused the access given earlier.

The issue of thousands of ex-tiger rehabilitees is a highly sensitive matter with political and security implications. The govt does not want to take a risk in this even if it gets criticised. The impression I get about the defence secretary is that he would prefer to get criticised rather than risk a grave security breach by letting each and every organization interact with the ex-tiger cadres

In such a situation I am getting a chance to play a role. The govt is prepared to let me interact with ex-tiger rehabilitees and others to be of some service. They trust me and also have nothing to fear about me because after all I am in their custody too. As for me I welcome this chance to be of service to some of my people particularly the ex-tiger cadres.

Q: What is it that motivates you in this respect?

A: I am perhaps the most senior among former tiger leaders today. I feel very very guilty when I see the tragic plight of the Tamil people today. I feel extremely sad and bad when I see the fate of these young people. I cannot deny that many of these children were forcibly recruited against their will.

I also feel a lot of remorse when I see the civilians of the Wannu. They were prosperous once but are now in abject poverty due to the war. Because of this I want to do some penance at least by helping them as far as possible.

There is also another reason. I heard a story last year that Prabhakaran and the leadership were engaged in a discussion in mid-May when someone had asked “What happens to our people and cadres”? To this Prabhakaran had apparently replied. “KP is there. He will look after the people and cadres.”

Some months ago I got reliable confirmation that such an incident had really happened and that Prabhakaran had referred to me that way openly. This knowledge that the last task entrusted to me was to look after these people has strengthened my resolve in this respect.

This is why I am motivated and I formed the North-East Rehabilitation and Development Organization (NERDO). It was formally registered on July 6th 2010. We have also been given security clearance to move about the north and east and have access to resettled IDP's and rehabilitees.

Q: Before we talk about NERDO, it does seem to me that you have got recognition as an NGO in a very short time. The NERDO has also got security clearance and access. This would not have been possible but for support at high levels. Was it with the blessings of the Defence secretary that NERDO got this approval and access?

A: Yes. We went through all the formalities and procedures and applied. But I don't think we would have got such quick approval without the backing of the Defence secretary.

Q: If I may return to an earlier aspect. It does seem crystal clear that you are able to enjoy some freedom of action despite being a detainee only because of the special relationship you have with Mr. Gotabhaya Rajapakse. As you told me earlier there was no “deal” of any kind and that your meeting point is the mutual desire to achieve certain related pro-people goals. Could you explain the circumstances under which this rapport evolved and continues to evolve?

A: Well I have already told you about how I was caught in Malaysia and brought to Colombo and how I met him for the first time. Thereafter at a subsequent meeting –the third one I believe- Mr. Gotabhaya asked me pointed questions about what I felt about the whole situation and what I wanted to do in the future.

I then told him very clearly that the war was over for me and that I fully realised that reviving an armed struggle for Eelam was out of the question. I told him that I feel very guilty about the plight of our people and that if given a chance I would like to help them in some small way at least as some form of penance.

Then the defence secretary said that he too wanted to ensure the speedy release and resettlement of IDP's and rehabilitation of ex-tiger cadres. He said he required some reliable people to help expedite matters in this regard. He asked me whether I would like to help him in this process. I said yes.

Some days later the military intelligence chief Gen. Kapila Hendavitharane informed me that my request had been discussed in detail by him and the defence secretary and that a favourable decision was reached. Thereafter I was given some autonomy of action to participate in the

process.

Q: You were a Consultant?

A: Nothing formal or official like that but yes I was consulted on some related matters. I was also allowed to interact with the cadres under detention and also people in the north

Q: In person?

A: No not directly only by telephone first. Then I was able to get delegations of parents of detainees from the North down to Colombo and meet them. It was at such a meeting that parents lamented about the situation of Jaffna university undergraduates being held under detention.

At that point I asked one of the officials present whether he could request the defence secretary to look into the matter and take positive action. This was done and I am happy to say the defence secretary immediately agreed in principle to release. Thereafter it was done in batches. Today no undergrad is in detention. Like that the rehabilitees are being released in batches according to specific categories

Q: What I understand from this is that you had no official position but you had a sort of unofficial special role assigned to you. Because of that you were able to associate and play a positive role in these matters?

A: Yes. This was before I formed the NERDO. Now I represent NERDO in matters of this type.

Q: So the government was basically in charge and took policy decisions and implemented them but you were able to play a supplementary role in an advisory capacity?

A: Exactly. It was the government that handled it. Matters concerning the ex-tiger cadre rehabilitees for instance came under the Bureau of the Commissioner –General of Rehabilitation. On that matter I must emphasise that the govt has appointed an appropriate person as commissioner-general. Brigadier Sudantha Ranasinghe is the ideal man for the job. He has lots of commitment and care for the welfare of the inmates at Protective Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centres (PARC).

Q: So what did you do or what do you do in these matters?

A: Whenever I am asked for an idea or suggestion I submit proposals. Some have been accepted. I give my opinion when asked about some scheme being planned. When a problem or reasonable request is brought to my notice I get in touch with officers concerned directly or indirectly and convey it to them. I also take the initiative and submit proposals

I must say that almost all officers and officials involved in these matters are sincere persons with lots of sympathy for the plight of these unfortunate people. So they are most receptive to ideas or suggestions and getting things done is no big problem at all.

WE also help out with some projects implemented by the government. This is done more through NERDO

Q: But why is there such slow progress in releasing and rehabilitating? Why can't it be done faster?

A: From what I see there is a genuine intention on the part of the government to resolve this issue efficiently and speedily. They have identified two wide categories. One is the hard core consisting of those suspected of being involved in some violence, some with years of experience in the LTTE and those who have taken the black tiger or suicide action oath. There are about 1400 in this category. Most of these people will be charged in courts.

Then there are the others or soft category. They are those with very little LTTE experience or recent conscripts or people involved in LTTE administration functions like the police or banks. These were numbering more than 11,000 but now are reduced to about 7- 8,000 because of regular releases.

The Govt is spending Rs 400 per day in looking after each of these persons. The govt will definitely like to release them soon and save the money being spent on them but for practical problems. As I said earlier the govt's fear is that the released ex-cadres may be exploited by interested parties and encouraged to engage in violence again.

One way of preventing such a possibility is to ensure that no rehabilitee will be idle or unemployed. That is why there are training and vocational skills programs for them. Those who get such training are being released in batches. The govt thinks such people will get gainful employment in Sri Lanka or abroad. This is why there is slow progress.

Q: Still why cannot a time bound deadline be set for the release ?

A: Because of the problems I mentioned. But I must say that the Defence secretary recently stated that he hopes everybody in the "soft" category would be released within six to nine months. I think every effort will be made to meet this deadline

But I want to tell those in the Diaspora one thing about this issue. Instead of criticising the Tamil Diaspora must help financially and even invest. If they help financially to provide training and jobs for these rehabilitees then they can be released faster. Instead of simply criticising why dont members of the Tamil Diaspora help financially and ensure speedy releases if they are really concerned? From my experience I can strongly say that the Defence secretary wants to release these people as soon as possible. Why not try and help instead of simply blaming him?

Q: On that note let me ask you about the defence secretary and yourself. How often do you interact with him?

A: It's like this. If I want to inform him of something I convey it through the officer who was assigned to liaise between us both. Likewise he does so too. Apart from this we have also met directly on some occasions to discuss issues relating to the IDP's and rehabilitees. In recent

times after we established NERDO the defence secretary takes a keen interest in that and checks on our progress every week. I am also able to contact officers under him if necessary

Q: Let us talk about the topic close to your heart now. Tell me about NERDO and how it came into being and what you hope to do through NERDO?

A: When we were discussing issues concerning the ex-tiger cadres and IDP's in the Wannai I felt that a non –governmental, social service organization was necessary to address these issues . It could work independently of the government but associate with the overall efforts of the govt in this respect. I found the govt officials receptive to this idea

So we started making preparations but things did not start to move in a big way. One of the problems was adequate funding. Then came the week long trip by some Tamil expatriates in June this year....

Q: I am sorry to interject but how did that trip take place?

A: Well the idea was for some Tamil expatriates to visit Sri Lanka and see for themselves the actual situation. Originally we wanted the visit to coincide with the Mullivaikkal battle anniversary in May. But due to some problems and the floods we had to put it off for June

In the first place we hoped to get more than 20 visitors. We arranged for 22 to visit. But later officials in Colombo felt a smaller number would be better due to logistical reasons. So it was whittled down to 12. But due to some last minute problems only 09 could come....

Q: Oh ! so tha's how it happened. Please go on about the NERDO?

A: Well the visit of the expatriates was a boost to our plans. The visitors had first hand experience of the situation and except for one person, all understood the realities. They appreciated the need for NERDO. Some donated funds .Though not huge the sum was enough to get things moving. The govt too was happy about the visit and acknowledged the fact that NERDO could be made a success.

So the paperwork was done quickly and thanks to Mr. Gota bhaya's support we got NERDO registered on July 6th. The chairman is Mr. S.Thavaratnam the president of the Northern Fishermen's Society Federation. I am the NERDO secretary.

Q: Why dont you give more details about NERDO? Address, telephones, bank accts etc?

A: Well our office is in Vavuniya. Our address is 10, 1st lane, Kathiresu Road, Vairavaputhiyankulam, Vavuniya.

Our telephone numbers are:

Tel.: +94 24 492 5438
Mob. : +94 75899 8034
Mob.: +94 77937 6919
Fax.: +94 24 222 1730.

Our E-mail is: info@nerdo.lk.

Our website is www.nerdo.lk

We have two bank accounts.

The official name is North–East Rehabilitation & Development organization.

In Colombo we have one acct at HSBC. The acct number is 012-160354-001. The code is HSBCLKLX.

In Vavuniya we have one at the Commercial Bank. The account number is 1610046482. The code is CCEYLKLX.

Q: Could you tell me more about the structure and function of NERDO?

A: Well we have just started and our resources at present are rather limited. We would really love donations from concerned people. Some funds are beginning to trickle in now.

Our office at Vavuniya is a modest one. We cant afford a big building or large staff. We have two officers there. One is from Jaffna and the other from the Up-country.

One handles the office work and the other is a field officer. They are paid salaries. We have also an internally displaced girl from the Wannu volunteering as a typist. She is paid an allowance.

We also have some volunteers helping out on a part –time basis without remuneration. Most of these persons are known to me personally like those from my village Myliddy or old classmates from Nadeswara college in Kanesanthurai and Mahajana College in Thellippalai. Some are fellow undergraduates from the Jaffna university.

Some of these persons are now school principals or government officers or bank employees. What is remarkable about this is that I did not maintain any contact with them after I went abroad in 1981. Since I was active in the LTTE and all these people were in Sri Lanka I avoided contact with them for their own safety.

Now they are all rallying around me and trying to do some service to the affected people. There are about 25 -30 people in this group. It will increase gradually I hope because we need efficient volunteers.

Q: What has NERDO done so far and what are your future plans?

A: Our first month progress is rather modest. NERDO gave Rs. 15,000 each to two schools in Kilinochchi to print question papers for term tests. They are the Vattakachchi Maha Vidyalayam and Ramanathapuram west Govt Tamil mixed school. There was also a disabled youth K.Puvaneswaran who was given 5,000 Rs to help him travel to sit for the GCE (AL) exams.

Apart from this NERDO also arranged for buns and tea to be given daily for a period of 28 days to 358 rehabilitees studying and sitting for the GCE AL exam and 119 rehabilitees studying for the GCE OL exam. The cost of supplying these buns and tea for 477 students and some teachers and officials was 450,000 Rupees. NERDO has paid up in full.

Q: But some media organs run by Diaspora Tamils are criticizing NERDO for this and saying that there was no need for you to do these and that the govt should have done it?

A: That is what these people will say but the reality is different on ground. Unlike these sections of the Diaspora we are not attacking the govt or pinpointing alleged faults. Unlike the Diaspora those of us working at ground level are in a partnership with the govt.

It is not an “us and them” thing with the govt. It is a case of “We” where the govt and we must do the best we can unitedly to help our people. The govt is also short of funds in some matters. Are we we to then blame the govt, sit back and do nothing about helping our people?

The people in the Diaspora who say things like this must understand that the govt could very well have forbidden the rehabilitees from sitting for the AL exam citing security concerns. They did not do so and despite the difficulties arranged for them to sit for exams and supplied food and provided transport and personnel.

An Australia based Tamil NGO helped with study materials and supplementary teacher expenses and stationery etc. We helped to make arrangements on ground for this. Then we at NERDO helped to provide buns and tea.

So it was a joint effort by three parties the govt, the Aussie NGO and NERDO to help our students sitting for the exam. The govt bore the major share of expenses and effort in this. The Diaspora must stop these stupid attacks.

Q: What are the future projects and plans for NERDO?~ dbsjeyaraj.com/ ~ DBS Jeyaraj can be reached at dbsjeyaraj2005@yahoo.com

A: Oh! We have lots of ideas and are working towards implementation. We are planning to open two more offices in Kilinochchi town and Mullaitheevu town to cater to the needs of re-settled people in those districts

Some specific projects being planned is the setting up of an abode or home called “Anbu Illam” (Abode of Love) in Vavuniya on the Mannar road. We intend providing a haven for children orphaned by the war, persons who have lost limbs or eyesight due to war and very old people

without anyone to look after them.

Already a Tamil Catholic nun from Colombo is running a shelter of this type for 40 people. Sinhala catholic nuns visit regularly in groups to help her. We are planning to tie up with this sister and expand her efforts with NERDO's help by establishing "Anbu Illam".

Another project is to set up a model farm in about 200 acres where we can teach and practice scientific agricultural methods for the ex-LTTE rehabilitees and even some of the IDP's. Again I must say this proposal was a brainchild of the Defence secretary. We are in the process of selecting an appropriate area to set up this model farm in Vavuniya or Kilinochchi district

We have also identified a village about 25 miles away from Vavuniya town with a very high figure of those without limbs and widows and elderly destitutes. We are planning to transform this into a model village providing employment and care as a community project

Another project is to set up an ambulance service. A benefactor from London has agreed to finance one vehicle and we hope to station it in Kilinochchi

Q: Apart from these specific projects do you have ideas of implementing comprehensive development master plans on a wider basis?

A: Yes we have. A Tamil academic from Australia has prepared an intergrated development plan to revive and resurrect our fisheries sector. I think the fisheries sector has been drastically affected in the north and east due to the war.

On the basis of that plan NERDO has devised a short term project called coastal fisheries rehabilitation program costing 605 million rupees. This comprises refurbishing existing fishing vessels and providing fishing gear like nets .If implemented properly this will provide full employment to around 3300 fisher families.

There are also studies underway to revive the agriculture and dairy and livestock sectors. One academic is already engaged in estimating and devising a master plan for agriculture. Another academic will arrive shortly to formulate a dairy and livestock development plan.

Another project we hope to set up is a Training Institute to provide technical and vocational skill education. Initially we hope to conduct short term courses and certificates for the ex-tiger cadre rehabilitees. These courses would cover a number of fields from motor mechanism to plumbing ,from electronics to landscape designing etc.

We also hope to create facilities for those obtaining these short term certificates to find employment and also pursue higher studies if necessary. Ultimately we hope to develop this into a full fledged Technical college or polytechnic.

Another idea is to stage a series of cultural shows in Various parts of the Country. The performers will be those ex-LTTE cadres being rehabilitated.

The well-known Sinhala film star Anoja Weerasinghe is conducting a drama workshop for sixty rehabilitees. I am very impressed by her dedication. One of our well known singers Shanthan is also a detenué with his two sons. We are planning to pool their efforts to stage concerts in a bid to create a positive image about ex-tiger cadres and also spread the message of peace and goodwill.

Q: Where does the government fit into in these matters?

A: As I told you we will be working independently but in partnership with the government. The situation today is that no one can function in the north and east or any part of Sri Lanka without Government support or approval. In the north and east we also need the full cooperation of the armed forces. This being the reality we must work in harmony with the govt while retaining our independence.

The govt is quite comfortable with the NERDO and will lend assistance and grant access. For example the govt will provide lands for us to set up projects like a model farm. NERDO hopes to link up with Govt plans like the “Vadakkinn Vasantham” (northern spring) and “Kizhakin Uthayam” (Eastern awakening) wherever possible and get assistance.

Q: Your plans are impressive but do you have the resources to implement them?

A: No, not yet but we are in an embryonic stage.

In the first place we must also be realistic enough to recognize that our people have gone back decades and decades in development. For instance our Railway line is not there in the north.

Our community was proud of our educational tradition. Today our schools are destroyed and students are squatting under trees for classes. A large number of children are not attending school due to poverty and lack of uniforms, footwear and text books. We are commissioning a survey of this situation.

But as our plans unfold and people get the message we hope to get lots of help and aid from our fellow Tamils from abroad. Already some qualified expatriates have agreed to come over and provide their academic and professional expertise on a voluntary basis. A few have promised financial assistance for special projects. I am confident that NERDO will gradually perform well with the help of our people.

Q: The problem is that a vociferous section of the Tamil Diaspora with great access to the media is conducting a vicious campaign against you and NERDO. They accuse you of being a govt stooge and that NERDO is a ruse to attract Tamil expatriate money from abroad and siphon it off to govt coffers. In such a hostile climate how do you hope to succeed?

A: Yes. You are right about the current climate but this will be a temporary situation I think. For one thing these sections unleashing a negative campaign are a minority but as you said they have a near monopoly on Tamil media abroad and therefore have an impact exceeding their actual strength. But still they are a minority and their campaign is based on lies and falsehood

What I am confident about and relying on is “sathiyam” (Truth).

Firstly we hope to publish all details about our projects and expenses and accounts of money received and spent on our website in addition to providing receipts. We will also answer all genuine queries. As more and more people see that we are open and transparent about these things the false propaganda won't be able to sustain itself.

Secondly we are also optimistic that the recipients of our aid and assistance will inform their friends and relatives abroad of the actual situation. When these people provide factual details about our genuine efforts those spreading false information will be exposed.

Thirdly we will encourage Diaspora members to visit Sri Lanka and see the situation themselves. We are ready to help them see things first-hand and arrive at their own conclusions. We have nothing to hide. NERDO is prepared to even assist people to travel to the north and east if they contact us. We are even thinking of stationing a NERDO representative at the Katunayake airport if necessary.

So gradually the truth will triumph and NERDO will succeed.

Q: I can see that you are an optimist. I saw a video clip of your meeting with some rehabilitees where you say “Nambikkai Thaan Vaalkkai” (Hope is life). I understand your mindset but do you think you can succeed against such formidable odds?

A: When I was given the task of overseas procurement (arms acquisition) by Prabhakaran in 1983 I was an utter novice. I came from a very common background. My father was politically conscious but was an ordinary fisherman. I did not study in elite schools. My English knowledge was weak. I had never travelled outside Sri Lanka and India. The LTTE was a fledgeling organization without any important contacts in the arms trade.

Yet I developed my department slowly and steadily. I expanded the LTTE's power to a stage where we were acquiring arms from diverse sources on a worldwide basis and shipping them regularly to the north-east. As long as I was in charge of overseas purchasing the LTTE was able to prolong the war successfully because I was able to procure arms continuously

If I could succeed then in a task which caused death and destruction why can't I succeed in this new task where my objective is to help people and re-build lives instead of destroying people and lives as in the past?

Q: I don't want to sound discouraging. I also do not dispute your ability and talent but the biggest difference here is that you are in custody and not a free man. Unlike earlier times you cannot move about freely to do things. Also you are older now and not in good health. Besides there is a fanatical lobby actively working against you. That is why I am doubtful.

A: You have a point but I do feel I will succeed. Yes it is frustrating to be detained and having to do attend to things by telephone, fax, skype and internet instead of being able to go to the places directly. I know that if I am on the spot I can get things done faster and better but then I

have to face reality. I think to myself I may be under detention but at least I have this opportunity to do some thing worthwhile for people.

Let me tell you one thing from the bottom of my heart. This is my third big task and opportunity. The first task was when I was appointed by Prabhakaran to procure arms. I succeeded in that. The second task was when I re-joined the movement to bring about a ceasefire and save the leadership and movement. I failed in that task

Now this is my third big task. In this my mission and vision is to help people. I am neither trying to arm a movement or trying to save it. This time I am engaged in a noble, worthy task of helping people to re-build lives. So I will definitely succeed.

Q: Why not make a request that you be released so that you can engage without any restraints or constraints in your mission to help people?

A: I will not make such a request now due to two reasons. One is that I don't want to be a free man when thousands of ex-LTTE cadres are not free yet. When the situation improves and the greater part of ex-cadres are released or brought to courts then I too can think of being free.

The other is that it may cause the govt some embarrassment to do so. Already the govt particularly the defence secretary is being criticized severely by the opposition on account of me. I don't want to make it more complicated. I think the President who is the defence minister will take a policy decision in consultation with the defence secretary about the LTTE on the whole at the appropriate time. I don't know what my fate will be. Until then I will do what I can under these circumstances

One positive thing is that a team of dedicated persons are slowly gathering around NERDO. So even if my mobility is restricted this team will work actively. But I have asked that I be re-located to Vavuniya if possible

Q: Some people say the govt is simply using you and will discard you later. What do you think?

A: I work in hope and trust and faith. I don't think that will happen. But for argument's sake let's say it happens. Even then I would have succeeded in helping some people at least as I am doing now. That's enough for me.

Q: On the other hand I know many Tamil politicians are worried about your entering politics. Any such idea?

A: No. I don't want to enter politics even if possible. Let those elected by the Tamils do politics. All that I want to do is to look after the welfare of ex –tiger cadre rehabilitees and IDP's. What our people need now are not politicians but humanitarians

Q: Will NERDO work for all the people of the North and East?

A: That is my long term goal but for now we will focus on the ex-LTTE cadres and IDP's.

Q: We have spoken for a long time. There are so many things to talk about. Maybe we can talk on another occasion. But before we conclude do you have any special message to Sri Lankans in general and the Tamil people in particular?

A: Thank you for conducting this conversation by telephone from far off Canada. We must do this again soon where I would be able to tell you of how much NERDO has achieved.

Yes I have two messages. The first is to my fellow Tamils. This is what I say. The war is over. Prabhakaran and other senior commanders are no more. Tamil Eelam is a lost cause. Please dont be deceived by irresponsible people into thinking that the armed struggle is not over. Please give up the confrontational attitude and help our broken people to re-build their lives. I appeal to members of the Tamil Diaspra and Tamil Nadu politicians to refrain from idle rhetoric and instead help Tamils in Sri Lanka to live in harmony and prosperity with others. We need reconciliation and co-operation not confrontation and friction

The second is to all my fellow Sri Lankans. We of the LTTE and other militant groups commenced an armed struggle to win back our lost rights. We thought Tamil Eelam was the answer and that the end will justify the means. In the course of our armed struggle we have caused much harm and misery to the people of Sri Lanka. We have violated all norms of civilized conduct at times. When I reflect on the past I am appalled by what has happened. As a senior leader or ex –leader of the LTTE I sincerely beg the forgiveness of all Sri Lankans for this. Please pardon us and help us to forge a bright future for all Sri Lankans.

Q: Thank you for this conversation. I wish you well in your well-meaning efforts. I also wish you success in your personal journey of redemption. I hope and pray you will reach your destination

A: Thank you again for this interview and your wishes. “Hope is life”.

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