

CHRONOLOGY OF LTTE TERROR - Part 11

From the **Daily News Archives**

When the euphoria of victory dies down, and together with it the media hype ceases, when the guns do not rattle and boom anymore, and the sky, the land and the sea become calm and serene, when tranquillity reigns through it is natural to live in the present moment and forget the past. But one cannot live in the present without a past. Nor can one envision the future discarding the experience of the preceding events. Hence the *Daily News* is serialising the Chronicle of LTTE Terror taken from our own archives which would remind our readers how it all began. An awareness of the chronology of terror would help us prevent the recurrence of such terror and frustrate any attempts by misguided elements to repeat history to suit their evil designs. It was not simple terror. Nor was terror sporadic. It was all pre-planned, pre-determined, well-calculated terror. The victims were innocent people. Though it is too many innumerate we would like to recall the major episodes in the Chronology of Terror.

LTTE explodes Air Lanka Tristar

WJITHA NAKKAWITA

The history of Tamil terrorist groups among Sri Lanka at the beginning through the shell of secrecy burst out in July 1983 when the terrorists ambushed an army truck setting off a landmine and shooting the injured soldiers who dragged themselves out of the blown up vehicle.

Thereafter the story that unfolds was a continuing trail of blood, tears and anguish mostly for the innocent civilians who did not play even a remote role in the conflict or the political upheavals that beset the nation for the next three decades.

By 1985 there were at least four Tamil terrorist groups - EPRLF, TELO, EROS and PLOTE with the Tamil political group the TULF once playing the signature tune of the now relegated to play the second fiddle to the terrorists.

It was during this time after the demise of Indian Premier Shrimathi Indira Gandhi that her successor son Rajiv Gandhi who too following the policy of his mother attempted to get involved in the affairs of Sri Lanka perhaps with geopolitical expediency in mind.

Thus after intervening in the armed conflict in Sri Lanka by first arming and training the Tamil terrorists on Indian soil New Delhi next tried their hands at diplomacy of sorts sending their emissaries to Colombo for talks with President Jayewardene. Emissaries like Emond Wickremesinghe or Harry Jayewardene were sent to India in return but the coded messages between the Indian High Commission, Colombo were not made privy to the local authorities nor did the Colombo government even at that stage had understood that there was a Trojan Horse that had a belly full of Tigers and other undesirable elements of a

motley character in it. However the terrorist groups themselves were now vying with one another for supremacy and each group had their own leadership though the goal they wished to achieve was a common one. It was in this scenario that New Delhi decided to hold talks between the government of Sri Lanka and the terrorist groups and the venue chosen was Thimpu in Bhutan the landlocked country under the foothills of the Himalayas more or less a protectorate of powers that be.

The Sri Lanka Government featured senior officials and lawyers and the Tamil terrorist groups were all represented by their representatives but by this time the all the five terrorist groups had formed a common front ENLF though there was no leader of that group. During the Thimpu talks the terrorist groups put out their demands that the government should agree on.

1) Recognizing Tamils as a nation.

2) That there was no identified homeland of the Tamils

3) The self-determination right of the Tamils should be recognized

4) Citizenship and rights of all Tamils living in the country should be recognized.

The government delegation was not prepared to accept these conditions though as a gesture of goodwill it had been agreed to declare a ceasefire before the Thimpu talks started. Therefore the talks went to continue for a few days but the main group the LTTE had called off their representative Thilagar from the talks and Prabhakaran had decreed that it would be useless to hold any talks with the government making it clear just two years since the terrorist groups came out in the open that their method was only violence. Unfortunately the authorities had not read the writing on the wall.

Thimpu talks collapsed though New Delhi was making a bid to get the terrorist groups to agree to a political settlement to stop the armed conflict and the killings of civilians by the terrorists mostly Sinhalese villagers stopped. Whether

the New Delhi authorities and their advisors foresaw the catastrophe that would engulf Sri Lanka for the next two decades was very doubtful but the tigers of various terrorist shades had only one language - that was violence.

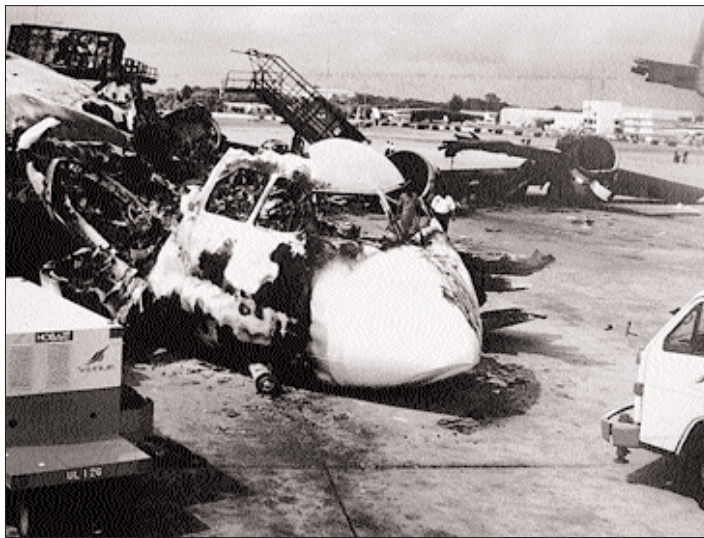
New Delhi accused Anton Balasingham the London based LTTE international spokesman a former translator of the British High Commission of being a foreign spy and his residence in Chennai came under a bomb attack making him leave talks and fly back to London. That was the first attempt at talking to the terrorists a fiasco that would repeat under each successive government till President Mahinda Rajapaksa called the bluff of the terrorists.

The LTTE by now the main terrorist outfit had dominated the acts of terrorism killing civilians in the north and east but they were to prove their intentions in making an attack on a civilian target very soon. It was May 3, 1986 when an Air Lanka aircraft the Tristar UL 512 flight to Male was ready for takeoff from the Bandaranaika International Airport Katunayake in the morning.

The aircraft Colombo City of the national carrier with a capacity of 276 had only 123 passengers on the manifest that day. Among the passengers were a number of foreigners and by 9.15 in the morning 111 passengers were on board the aircraft while another 22 passengers were being cleared for travel. Suddenly a huge explosion rocked the airport and its environs and the Tristar exploded breaking to two at the centre.

Some of the passengers in flames rushed out of the wreckage and several of them succumbed to their injuries. By the time fire fighting crews came on the scene and doused the flames of the aircraft 23 passengers had died with another 41 injured. The LTTE had made this attack.

A team of CID men directed by senior DIG (CID) Tyrrel Goonetilleke have been assigned the task, and all facilities needed will be placed at their disposal, Mr. Herath said. "They have only to ask".



Parts of the Air Lanka Tristar torn on the tarmac

Who did it... and where? Questions for CID

WILLIAM DE ALWIS, R. B. M. SUMANADASA AND GILBERT DIAS

No arrests have been made in connection with Saturday's blasting of the Airlanka Tristar at the Katunayake International Airport, IGP Cyril Herath told the 'Daily News', as a strong team of police investigators, backed by senior officials from the Government Analysts Department and the aviation authorities began to put together a welter of circumstances of evidence.

The IGP admitted yesterday that the answers to main questions in the investigation - where the bomb originated, and who place it there, were still to be found yet no stone would be left unturned to get at the truth, he said.

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The Monday after Saturday's catastrophe

The IGP added: "In an investigations of this nature it is still too early to make any comments... all depends on what we shall ultimately find out, and we are making a beginning."

"For instance, the caps which were found in the wreckage, with some people have identified as a clue to the perpetrators of this deed, have yet to be fully investigated. We cannot be certain at this stage" he said.

The team assigned from CID began what promise to be a marathon interrogation soon after the outrage, at the airport. "Every employee who was present will have to be questioned, and the whereabouts of others who should have been there but were not have to be ascertained", police said.

Others whom the police would like to meet will be those who left the airport soon after the explosion. There was every likelihood that even passengers disembarking in Colombo were able to move out unchecked by the Customs

in the confusion which followed, and the police would like to meet these people.

SP CID Mr. T. B. Sumanasekera headed a team of investigators assigned to interrogate and record at the airport. CID Director, Amarasena Rajapaksa was at the airport yesterday with over 30 police officers, recording statements of all who were on duty on the apron when the blast occurred.

Shortly afterwards, a hospital plane arrived at Katunayake from Switzerland, to evacuate some of the injured who wanted to be treated in Europe.

On Board this flight were Dr. Buser Thomas and nurse Anne Lise Stab.

Police sources said that although the "Black Tiger" caps found in the Tristar's cargo were being investigated, present thinking was that these were a commercial product and being flown to Male for sale or use there.

"They were clearly fac-

tory manufactured articles, not something put together somewhere. Certainly we are looking into that aspect, but we don't think the caps are relevant to the blast," one source said.

Some of those on the ill-fated plane went on to Male as scheduled in an Airlanka flight which left Colombo at 2.30 p.m. Saturday officials said. Others, shaken by the incident, stayed on in Colombo.

Activity at the airport as swiftly brought back to normal, and inward and outward flights continued as usual.

Airport officials said there had been as many as 400 visitors arriving in Colombo upto 11 am yesterday, with more expected later in the day. The wreckage was not cleared from the tarmac as insurance inspectors from London were due to examine the damage.

The wide-bodied Tristar, with its tail blackened and awry, almost torn off from the rest of the air-

craft, stood as it did on Saturday, mutely testifying to a brutal act of terrorism.

Air Lanka Chairman, Rakhitha Wikramanayake, said the airline will issue two tickets without charge to each of the bereaved families who may wish to fly there to identify their dead or make other arrangements.

Capt. Wikramanayake said the Tristar, purchased in 1982 from AQL Nippon Airlines at a cost of USD 17 million, was fully insured for USD 25 million. Additionally, insurance cover upto a limit of USD 600 million was provided for passengers and crew. The Tristar which arrived from London via Zurich and Dubai as UL-512, was thereafter flying on to Male as a new flight UL-101 - when it was blown up minutes before departure.

Airport Manager John de Saram and his staff were warmly praised for the manner in which they responded to the emergency.



The wreckage of the Tristar after the blast