

CURRENT EVENTS

TAMIL NADU

Above the Law



LAST fortnight, three armed men stormed into the house of General Insurance Surveyor S.L. Prabhu, 46, in Anna Nagar in north-west Madras and decamped with diamond and gold jewellery worth Rs 68,000. Police rounded up 20 Sri Lankan Tamil militants belonging to the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) for interrogation. They were subsequently let off.

The case was symptomatic of the fact that the Tamil Nadu police, for extraneous political reasons, are not able to strictly enforce the law of the land over the Tamil militants whose number in the state is now conservatively put at 5,000. What causes greater concern is that most of the Tamil militants in India belong to the less disciplined and financially less resourceful People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the TELO.

It is a potentially dangerous situation and the police seem to be powerless to act. As early as 1983, the additional sessions judge in Madras had issued a non-bailable arrest warrant against the leader and military commander of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Velupillai Pirabhakaran. To date, the police have been powerless to execute it. Instead, they have had to undergo the embarrassment of providing security for him during his frequent trips to Delhi in 1985 and 1986 for discussions on the Sri Lankan ethnic problem. Indian security forces had to fly him to Bangalore during the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Confided a police inspector, who has been dealing with a number of criminal cases involving the militants: "We have had to wink at some of these things for political reasons. How do you go with a non-bailable arrest warrant to a man who is frequently invited by the chief minister for breakfast?"

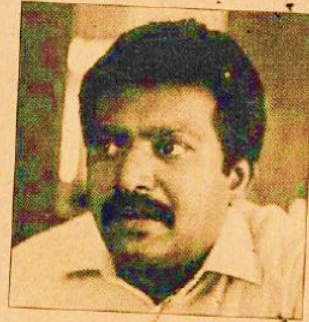
The non-bailable arrest warrant had been issued against Pirabhakaran and his former close associate Raghavan after they jumped conditional bail in a criminal case. The case related to the two opening fire on PLOTE Secretary-General K. Uma Maheswaran and his associate Jotheeswaran on the night of May 19,

1982, in the busy Pondy Bazar area of central Madras. Raghavan has since been in and out of Tamil Nadu, while the police have looked on helplessly.

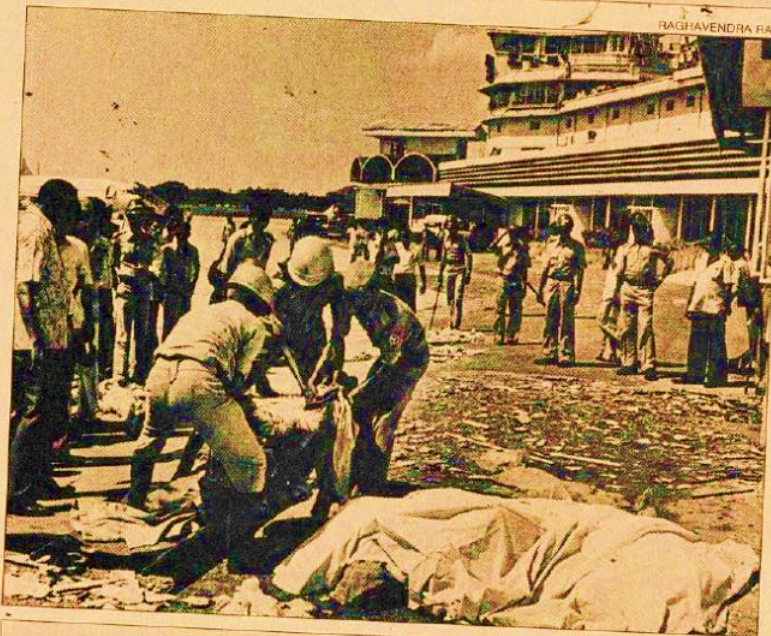
In the criminal case relating to the bomb blast in the international arrival hall of Meenambakkam Airport on August 2, 1984, which left 30 killed and 37 injured, the judicial second class magistrate in Saidapet in the city issued non-bailable arrest warrants against both Thambapillai Maheswaran, leader of the small militant group, the Tamil Eelam Army (TEA), and Vigneswara

Raja, a retired customs collector from Sri Lanka. Both of them were out on conditional bail after three months' remand and both have subsequently jumped bail. While Raja has not surfaced after that, Maheswaran has reportedly made several trips between Madras and Singapore. In fact, reliable militant and police sources confirm that the TEA leader was in Madras on March 14 this year. State police are now working on the assumption that Maheswaran must have provided the technical expertise for the recent bomb blast which resulted in the

In spite of a non-bailable arrest warrant issued as early as 1983 by the additional sessions judge in Madras against Pirabhakaran, the police till date have been powerless to execute it.



RAGHAVENDRA RAO



In the Meenambakkam Airport bomb blast case, both Thambapillai Maheswaran and Vigneswara Raja have jumped bail despite non-bailable warrants against them.