

Implicating LTTE is irresponsible: Yogi

Senior LTTE leaders in Jaffna have emphatically denied any involvement in Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, and have described statements from Indian Ministers implicating the LTTE as irresponsible and emotional.

Mr. Yogaratnam Yogi, general secretary, LTTE's political wing, said, "We have been blamed by people from Ministers downwards, but without a shred of evidence. These are irresponsible statements based on an emotional outburst."

Mr. Anton Balasingam, LTTE's political adviser, pointed out that the Tigers had issued a statement from London stating that they were not in any way involved. "The Congress party is accusing the LTTE. We are disappointed to note this. After all, Mahatma Gandhi and Mrs. (Indira) Gandhi were also assassinated, indicating that there are many forces within India hostile to the establishment. We can't understand why we are being blamed."

Mr. Yogi said he felt the LTTE was being blamed because there would be a domestic backlash if anyone else was involved.

Asked about the technology used in the explosion, which seemed to point to the LTTE, Mr. Balasingam said that it was wrong to say the technology used was sophisticated. "It was just a matter of joining two wires together. As for the explosives used, there is no shortage of explosives in India."

Questioned about the political motive the LTTE might have had in preventing Rajiv Gandhi from coming back to power and insisting that the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement be the basis for any political settlement, Mr. Balasingam said the as-

sassination would not change anything if a Congress government came back to power. "The Congress party manifesto mentioned the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, and any Congress government would have followed the same policy."

Mr. Balasingam also said that foreign policy in India was made by bureaucrats rather than politicians, and so assassinating Rajiv Gandhi would not really achieve anything.

The LTTE adviser also pointed out that an LTTE representative had met Rajiv Gandhi recently, and by all accounts the meeting had gone off well.

Asked whether the widespread suspicion of the LTTE's involvement in the assassination would affect their relations with Indian political parties, Mr. Yogi said, "Without concrete evidence, it cannot affect us."

About the possibility of Tamil refugees being asked to leave Tamil Nadu, Mr. Balasingam said, "I don't think these people will be thrown out. For decades Tamil Nadu has been a refuge for them."

Distrust for Rajiv Gandhi: The LTTE's denial, however, should be viewed in the context of its general political and military strategy. The Tigers have never admitted to any of the assassinations they have been linked with, and are unlikely to admit responsibility for Rajiv Gandhi's death even if they were involved. The assassination should also be seen in the context of the deep distrust that senior LTTE leaders, including its leader, Mr. V. Prabhakaran, had for Rajiv Gandhi.

To the LTTE, Rajiv Gandhi was the man who betrayed the Tamil cause by signing an accord that met India's security interests, but not Tamil

demands for genuine autonomy. Rajiv Gandhi is also blamed for the chain of events that led to the outbreak of hostilities between the LTTE and the IPKF. Mr. Prabhakaran is also known for the ruthless and single-minded dedication with which he has removed potential stumbling blocks which would hinder Tamil aspirations from being achieved.

In private conversations senior LTTE leaders have made no effort to hide their suspicion of India, and their desire to prevent any further active Indian intervention in Sri Lanka. Whatever the feelers that might have been sent out by the LTTE representatives in India, the suspicion of India and particularly Rajiv Gandhi is deeply ingrained within the core leadership of the LTTE.

The LTTE's suspicion of Rajiv Gandhi does not in any way link them to his assassination, but it does provide the context within which any denials of involvement or any demands for Indian mediation or involvement should be viewed.

Cool reaction in Jaffna: In Jaffna itself, the reaction to Rajiv Gandhi's death has been cool, largely because he is perceived as the man responsible for putting the IPKF on a collision course with the Tamils. "When Indira Gandhi was assassinated, there was a spontaneous outburst of grief," said one Jaffna resident. "People wept and put up banners and flags of mourning. This time, there has been absolutely no reaction. People blame him for what the IPKF did."

"We are all so absorbed in the everyday struggle to get enough food that outside events hardly sink in," said a University professor.

LTTE-Rajiv meeting led to good relationship: Kittu

The LTTE leader, Mr. Sathasivam Krishnakumar alias Kittu, has confirmed that a meeting did take place between the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and the LTTE representative, Mr. Kasi Anandan in New Delhi on March 5. The meeting led to a 'good relationship' between Rajiv Gandhi and the LTTE and therefore, the LTTE had no reason to kill him, Mr. Kittu added.

Mr. Kittu told *The Hindu* from his residence in London that the Sri Lankan Government was anxious about the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement being revived if Rajiv Gandhi were to return to power.

Plastic explosives: Answering a question on only the LTTE having the technology and precision to use the plastic explosives that killed the former Prime Minister, Mr. Kittu said India had supplied 'large quantities' of plastic explosives to all the Tamil militant groups when they were receiving training in arms in India. "In the battlefield, these groups did not get an opportunity to use them," he added.

There were also many 'Eelam Tamil women' who were affected when the Indian Peace-Keeping Force was in Sri Lanka. One of the affected women could have come to the conclusion on her own to take direct action, he said.

Asked about the Congress(I) spokesman, Mr. Pranab Kumar Mukherjee's denial of 'the whole report' about the unpublicised meeting between Rajiv Gandhi and Mr. Kasi Anandan in New Delhi on March 5, Mr. Kittu said Mr. Kasi Anandan did meet Rajiv Gandhi on behalf of the LTTE. "I gave him permission (to meet Rajiv Gandhi). I am a Central Committee member of the LTTE. He asked me whether he should meet Rajiv Gandhi

or not. He sought permission from me not only to meet Rajiv Gandhi but even to make arrangements to meet him. Rajiv Gandhi knew that Mr. Kasi Anandan is our political leader. Only after he knew it, he agreed to meet (Kasi Anandan). The meeting lasted 45 minutes... The LTTE leader, Mr. V. Prabhakaran's permission was also given for Mr. Kasi Anandan to meet Rajiv Gandhi," Mr. Kittu said.

In the meeting between the former Prime Minister and the LTTE representative, Rajiv Gandhi said that he would do what was possible on his part to mitigate the hardship of the Sri Lankan Tamils, Mr. Kittu said. "Rajiv Gandhi said he had wanted to solve the Tamils' problem through the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement but certain unexpected incidents took place" the LTTE leader said from London.

Besides, Mr. Arjuna Sithampalam of London also met Rajiv Gandhi within two weeks of Mr. Kasi Anandan meeting Rajiv Gandhi, Mr. Kittu said. But Mr. Sithampalam, 'an international banker,' did not meet the former Prime Minister on behalf of the LTTE. He met Rajiv Gandhi on behalf of the Tamils.

Good relationship: Even in that meeting, Rajiv Gandhi referred to the Tamil problem. He said he wanted to help the Sri Lankan Tamils and that the Tamil struggle was a just one. He said the Tamil struggle should not end in failure. At the same time, Rajiv Gandhi said his desire was that Sri Lanka should be stable. When you consider all this, anybody will understand that there was a good relationship between Rajiv Gandhi and the LTTE," Mr. Kittu said.

"As far as the LTTE is concerned, there is no justification for the LTTE to have inimical feelings towards Rajiv Gandhi... The LTTE has never interfered in the local politics of India. So there was no room for the Congress(I) or Rajiv Gandhi to entertain any inimical feelings towards the LTTE and vice versa. After the withdrawal of the IPKF, the relationship between Rajiv Gandhi and the LTTE was built up step by step. Therefore, there cannot be any connection between the LTTE and this murder," Mr. Kittu said.

On the assessment that only the LTTE cadres, including its women fighters, had the highest motivation to carry out such an assassination, Mr. Kittu said that the LTTE cadres did have the highest motivation but the LTTE could not be blamed for all the incidents. "There were several struggles under way in India to obtain their rights. It cannot be said that men taking part in these struggles are afraid of losing their lives. As far as this operation is concerned, our argument is that anybody can do it. Besides, when you look deeply at it, the Sri Lankan Government was worried that the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement would be revived if Rajiv Gandhi were to return to power," he said.

When it was pointed out to him that the LTTE also would have been very apprehensive about the revival of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, that it had derailed the Agreement in the past and so it had a strong reason to kill Rajiv Gandhi fearing his return to power, Mr. Kittu replied, "The Agreement is a political problem. It is a big issue. We wanted to discuss it elaborately and solve it. It cannot be solved in one stroke. Just because Rajiv Gandhi died, nobody can expect the Agreement also to die. Such an argument is fallacious."