

# LTTE denial not credible, say other groups

The denial by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of involvement in the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi should be seen against the background of the group's record of "irrational violence" observers here say.

If, despite the denial, the Tigers have emerged as the main suspects in the assassination, it is due not only to circumstantial evidence but also the erosion of their credibility, they said.

"With the LTTE you cannot look for rational thinking or action," said the leader of a rival Tamil group, commenting on press reports that the militants had no reason to assassinate the Indian leader after the reported cordial meeting with him by one of their leaders.

The People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) leader Mr. O. Sithadthan said such reports were given credence largely because of ignorance of the LTTE's modus operandi. "The LTTE chief, Mr. Prabhakaran would have taken the decision to eliminate Rajiv long ago, perhaps when the IPKF was still fighting the LTTE in the North and East," he said.

Once such a decision was made, a small group with necessary expertise is assigned the job, and they carry it out, regardless of the time and location, he said. After the assignment is given, the killer group acts on its own, except for logistical support given by cadres and supporters of the group in the area of their operation.

Mr. Sithadthan said this method of operation made it possible for the LTTE to easily deny involvement in the killing because the killers having virtually snapped all links with the group for some time, were difficult to be traced back.

Other observers pointed out that the LTTE had similarly denied involvement in the killing of Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leader Amrithalingam here two years ago.

But when the three militants, who carried out the assassination were themselves shot dead by Amrithalingam's security personnel and their identity as LTTE men was conclusively established, the group said the three were deserters, having left the organisation some time ago. At the same time, posters carrying the pictures of the three had been put up in the North and East, praising them for their "heroic deed."

**'Disowning the person':** One observer referred to London-based LTTE leader Anton Raja's statement suggesting that the Rajiv Gandhi assassination might be the act of an individual affected by the IPKF operations and said the LTTE seemed to be already preparing to disown the killer in the event of her identity being established as an LTTE member.

Mr. N. Srikantha, political adviser to the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) said it was "inconceivable" that Rajiv would have promised help to the LTTE when a leader of the group called on him in March as claimed by DMK leader and former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Mr. M. Karunanidhi.

"It smacks of a sinister attempt on the part of Mr. Karunanidhi to divert and deflect the serious allegation made against the LTTE that it was responsible for the assassination," he said.

He said when he and other TELO leaders met Rajiv Gandhi on January 30 at his residence in New Delhi, they had found him "sharing our view in regard to the intransigence of the LTTE". The Congress(I) leader Mr. Natwar Singh and Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyer were also present at the meeting.

**Committed to the accord:** "He agreed with us that the LTTE's action are harmful to the interests of the Tamil community and expressed deep anguish about the plight of Tamil civilians," Mr. Srikantha said, adding Rajiv was "firmly committed to the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka accord."

"It is inconceivable that the same Rajiv Gandhi would have changed his views by March. The least we expect from Mr. Karunanidhi, if he wants to help the Sri Lankan Tamils, is not to defend the LTTE", he said.

Another observer pointed out that it was part of the LTTE's strategy to talk and fight at the same time. The group was talking to the TULF leadership when the unsuspecting Amrithalingam was gunned down. Similarly, President Mr. R. Premadasa was holding secret talks with the rebels when they launched the war against his Government in June last, he pointed out.

Mr. Sithadthan and others are convinced that the woman suicide bomber, who killed Rajiv Gandhi was a Sri Lankan Tamil, judging from her

pictures published in the press here. But they do not totally rule out the possibility of some extremist group in Tamil Nadu carrying out the assassination through LTTE cadres. "The LTTE input is definite there, in terms of technology and personnel", one of them said.

They said it was common knowledge both in Sri Lanka and India that the LTTE had imparted arms and explosives training to "volunteers" in Tamil Nadu who, in turn, have provided sanctuary and protection to the group in the State.

In the volatile atmosphere created by the parliamentary elections, some of them could have decided to carry out the attack with LTTE's help.

Some observers blame the Government of India and Tamil Nadu for turning a "blind eye" to the activities of Sri Lankan militants in the State for so long that they have come to believe they can extend their campaign of violence across the Palk Strait with impunity.

They said hundreds of thousands of Tamils from the island who had fled to Tamil Nadu since 1983 to escape the ethnic conflict in the island had permanently settled down there and even acquired Indian citizenship by "buying" Indian passports. These people had become tools in the hands of the rebels who extract their cooperation for their activities, either voluntarily or through threats against their family members still living in the north-east.

Rival Tamil groups say that the LTTE has deeply infiltrated the Tamil Nadu polity that they have considerable freedom for their activities. The leaders the EPRLF are convinced that their leader K. Padmanabha and 13 others could not have been massacred in Madras in last June without collusion by local people.

A party spokesman Mr. Abbo Yusuf said he had no doubt that the LTTE was responsible for the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and it was part of a larger plan by certain foreign forces to destabilise India and the entire region. "The irresistible inference from this... unimaginable violence in the electoral politics of Tamil Nadu is the irrefutable involvement of the LTTE mercenaries," concurred Mr. G. Karunakaran, TELO MP.

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### After Rajiv

**E**VEN as the country is trying to recover from the disorientation caused by the paralysing shock of Rajiv Gandhi's sudden death at the hands of an assassin, it is being overwhelmed by the press of immediate practical problems that it cannot evade. Affairs of state and urgencies of politics do not allow for the luxury of grief. Rajiv Gandhi's death has occurred midway through a crucial election. This has given rise to constitutional and legal conundrums and difficult choices for the Government, the Election Commission, and political parties. Even more urgently, the manner of his death, the possible motivations behind it and, above all, its probable impact on the public mood call for discipline and self-restraint on the part of everyone and the utmost vigilance on the part of the administration.

Taking the last point first: If the awesome tragedy of Rajiv Gandhi's death is not to be diminished, vulgarised and dragged through a sanguinary mire, the utmost

circumspection should be exercised by everyone. With no clue as yet of who was responsible for the dastardly act, the temptation to speculate on the probable candidates for this ignoble "honour" should be resisted. There is little doubt that it was a political assassination. But the fixing of the responsibility for it should be left to the investigating agencies who should, incidentally, get on with the job with all expedition. Meanwhile, it would be the height of irresponsibility to point the finger of suspicion, innocently or with malice, in any particular direction. For such speculation will lead to public disorder of the most obnoxious kind. The fell deed is done. And it is the duty of every responsible citizen not to make it the occasion for the massacre of innocents by mindless mobs. It would be an insult to Rajiv Gandhi's memory to allow the repetition of the 1984 riots in the wake of Mrs Gandhi's assassination, which were themselves an insult to Mrs Gandhi's memory. For its part, the administration should redouble its vigilance to ensure that this does not happen.