

# 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 (PLOT) 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.

aus: Hindu, Madras, 8.6.91

## INDIAN EXPRESS

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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.



On the constitutional and legal consequences of Rajiv's death in the midst of a tight timetable for the Lok Sabha elections, the Election Commission's swift decision to postpone the polls slated for May 23 and 26 to June 12 and June 15 has had the salutary effect of short-circuiting unhealthy argumentation over available options. There is no doubt that it is the right decision. It shows, in the midst of surrounding gloom, a robust conviction that in a democracy, political life must go on, no matter how crippling the blow dealt to it.

As for post-electoral problems and anxieties over the time needed for the passage of a "regular budget" (which determined the original desire, now shattered, of the President for a new Lok Sabha in position by June 5), these bridges can be crossed when we come to them. In any case, it is not beyond the ingenuity of our constitutional experts to find answers for them — such as the invocation of the "doctrine of necessity" — when the time comes, what is unthinkable is the aborting of the electoral process already set in motion on specious grounds of expediency and seductive alternatives.

Remains the question of political choices, particularly by the Congress Party. There is no doubt that Rajiv Gandhi's death has altered the configuration of Indian politics more decisively than even Mrs Gandhi's. All kinds of possibilities and combinations of forces across the board of Indian politics have been opened up. Indian politics has been thrown into a melting pot as never before. It is too early to say what will be the nature of the realignments. Immediately, all the psephological punditry of the last few weeks has been rendered totally irrelevant and the outcome of the elections is very much an open-ended affair as a consequence of Rajiv's death. More fundamentally, present party formations, particularly at the Centre, are likely to undergo chameleonic changes in the coming weeks and months. Every political party barring the BJP and perhaps the Communists will be churned up as never before with identities of the recent past eagerly shed. But the most crucial decisions will be for the Congress Party to make. It now has an opportunity to rid itself of its burdens of the past and order its affairs on the lines of a modern democratic party free at last of "dynastic" trammels.

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## THE TIMES OF INDIA

# India After Rajiv

A thoroughly bewildered India bade farewell to Rajiv Gandhi on Friday. It will be a while before the nation recovers from the sheer horror of his brutal end. Before this happens, however, it is bound to be assailed by ominous doubts about the future. Already the question has been raised in certain circles, both at home and abroad, whether India can survive as one nation, let alone as a democracy, in the wake of the assassination. While the question cannot be dismissed lightly, it cannot also be allowed to condition our reflexes. Unfortunately, the rumours and proposals which were floated in the capital within hours of Mr Gandhi's death appeared to do precisely that. It was easy to ignore the whispers about the imposition of an emergency and even about an impending military coup: these were clearly the products of an overheated imagination. It was equally possible to reject the talk about the possible cancellation of the elections. But the proposal to form a national government, or to convene a fresh constituent assembly, falls into another category altogether. The idea is a non-starter to begin with. Since the political forces in the country are polarised along sharply antagonistic lines, it is inconceivable that they can come together and function effectively even for a day. However, this is not the main reason why the proposal is objectionable. The fact that President R. Venkataraman reportedly aired it is what makes it appear to be truly galling. With the election still to be completed, how could the President, who is otherwise so punctilious about his role as the custodian of the Constitution, assume that the elections will result in a hung Parliament and then proceed on the basis of that assumption to invite political leaders to consider the idea?

The fact of the matter is that this proposal, like the other suggestions, insinuations and rumours, displays an astonishing, not to say dangerous, lack of faith in the electoral process. It is just as well that all political parties, with the exception of the

BJP, made it clear in the most unambiguous terms that they would have nothing to do with the idea of a national government. The BJP voiced its reservations too but these appeared, for reasons that are difficult to fathom, somewhat ambivalent. Be that as it may, at a time when the country is plunged in grave crisis, it is incumbent on all those who are involved in public affairs to ensure that the democratic will prevails without let or hindrance. This must not and cannot mean that we should be oblivious of the flaws in our democratic system.

Indeed, a calm appraisal of the legacy that Rajiv Gandhi bequeaths to the nation would provide useful pointers to chart our future course as a sovereign independent, secular and democratic nation. The legacy as is only to be expected, is a very mixed one. He inherited a huge and amorphous party which had exercised power for so long that it had lost its moorings. He himself admitted as much in his celebrated speech at the Congress centenary session held in Bombay in December 1985. He denounced the "brokers of power and influence" who only "dispensed patronage to convert a mass movement into a feudal oligarchy." He was appalled by the fact that Congressmen talked of high principles and lofty ideals but they obeyed no discipline, no rule, followed no principle of public morality, displayed no sense of social awareness, showed no concern for the public weal. It is in this speech, which was widely acclaimed at that time for its refreshing candour, that Rajiv Gandhi promised to reorganise and revitalise the party, break the nexus between political parties and vested interests, amend the electoral law and conduct a vigorous war against all those who exploited the poor in the guise of caste and religion.

Most of these promises turned out to be hollow. It is true that one of Rajiv Gandhi's first achievements as Prime Minister