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Tigers tipped as Gandhi assassins

THE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have emerged as chief suspects, Indian authorities say, after a female suicide bomber assassinated former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the southern state of Tamil Nadu on 21 May.

After the first day of voting in India's general election, Mr Gandhi was campaigning in Sriperumpudur, 25 miles south of Madras. Among those waiting to greet him was a tall dark-skinned 25 year-old woman who, as she bent to touch his feet in a traditional gesture of supplication, detonated two kilos of RDX plastic explosive strapped to her body.

Mr Gandhi was killed instantly along with 19 others, many hit by hundreds of steel pellets in the bomb. The assassin's severed head was hurled 30 feet by the blast.

Mr Gandhi, reluctantly drafted into politics after his mother Mrs Indira Gandhi was assassinated by Sikh militants in 1984, had shrugged off the tight security surrounding his tenure as Prime Minister in a bid to establish himself as "a man of the people" and return the Congress (I) party and the Gandhi dynasty to power.

In the aftermath of the assassination, Mr Gandhi's Italian wife Sonia, turned down the job of party president and 70-year old former foreign minister Narasimha Rao was appointed as a stopgap leader. Political pundits see Mr Gandhi's daughter Priyanka as cast in the same combative mould as her grandmother Indira Gandhi but at 19, she must wait six years to stand for parliament.

On 28 May, as Mr Gandhi's 21 year-old son Rahul, consigned his father's ashes to the confluence of two of India's sacred rivers at Allahabad, over 200 people had been killed in election-related violence throughout the country, 12 of them parliamentary candidates in the Punjab where Sikhs seek a separate state. The final round of polling is postponed until 12 and 15 June.

Hours after Gandhi's death, Tamil Nadu Congress party president V Ramamurthy blamed a Tamil Tiger sui-

cide squad for the killing and called for the expulsion of 220,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, accusing them of introducing "gun culture" to the south.

Bands of Congress party supporters roamed deserted towns and villages in Tamil Nadu burning shops, cars and houses belonging to rival Tamil DMK party members. Indian Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar dismissed the DMK government in Tamil Nadu in January, for actively supporting the Tigers.

In 48 hours of mayhem, 11 people were killed and over 1,500 arrested as police and army patrols alternately searched and stood guard over 300 Sri Lankan refugee camps. Around 150 LTTE militants were detained and a refugee settlement near Salem burned out. Observers fear further violence if Tiger involvement in the Gandhi killing is confirmed. Thousands of Sikhs died in New Delhi in Congress-inspired riots after Mrs Gandhi's assassination in 1984.

For over ten years, Mrs Gandhi and later her son Rajiv covertly funded the Tamil Tigers and other militant groups in northern Sri Lanka encouraging them to build up a *pinthalam* or "rear-base" under successive regional governments in south India, which became an important part of their military strategy.

The Gandhis' attempts to control and then destabilise the Tamil separatist movement foundered when an Indian Peace Keeping Force was withdrawn from northern Sri Lanka, after the Congress party was forced into opposition in November 1989.

With Gandhi tipped to return to power, a Tiger negotiating team led by Central Committee member Kasi Ananthan met Rajiv in New Delhi on 5 March this year and again in Madras in early April. Gandhi apparently refused to endorse a Tiger one-party state in northern Sri Lanka and insisted the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord gave India a casting vote in a formula for Tamil devolution.

Fears of further Indian intervention gave the Tigers a compelling motive for the killing say analysts in New Delhi but

Indian Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar was keeping his options open. PLO leader Yasser Arafat had warned Gandhi a month earlier of a plot to kill him. The Tigers were definitely involved, Chandra Shekhar told the London *Observer* in late May, but whether they were used by someone else was unclear. The LTTE has denied involvement in the killing.

One variant on this conspiracy says the Tigers contracted the killing from Sikh militants in return for Pakistani arms to deal with new Sri Lankan air force F7 jet fighters supplied by the Chinese this month. There are other passages in this labyrinth of theories that lead inevitably to every other Indian political party and faction. But there have been rumours in Tamil circles since last December of a LTTE female hit-squad on operational alert in south India.

Police say Gandhi's assassin had three accomplices and an Indian taxi driver who drove a group from Kodaikanal to Sriperumpudur on the day of the killing is currently under arrest. Indian security chief Vijay Karan arrived in Colombo in late May after offers of help from the Sri Lankan government. Sources evidently say two LTTE suicide bombers killed Sri Lankan Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne in Colombo on 2 March using the same type of plastic explosive.

A photo of Gandhi's assassin taken moments before the explosion is said to identify her as *Sundari*, one of the Tiger's female cadre. A man standing close to her, also killed in the blast, is said to be Haribabu, a photographer who worked for the LTTE.

Sri Lankan police are now seeking Manohari Sathanathan a woman implicated in the 1987 Maradanabomb blast in Colombo, attributed to Tamil group EROS. The Indian team travelled to Vavuniya seeking information on a Tamil policewoman who recently absconded from Kalmunai and further suspects were arrested by police in Tamil Nadu. New Delhi has now taken full control of the investigation as the evidence for the Tamil connection mounts.

THE NORTH

Laying waste to the Vanni

AFTER CURFEW was clamped down on isolated Mullaitivu District on 1 May, Sri Lankan forces launched a dual offensive on key Tiger bases in the Vanni jungles north-west of Omanthai.

Naval gunboats shelled Alampil and Nayaru lagoon while helicopter gunships prowled a chain of inland waterways used by the Tigers to supply bases in the Nedunkerni jungles. Two Army brigades, over 3,000 strong pushed north from Vavuniya smashing through the checkpoint at Thandikulam capturing the Tiger stronghold of Nochchimoddai and then Omanthai ten miles north.

Much of Omanthai including the hospital is badly damaged and local sources say civilian casualties have been heavy. The Army claims to have captured two major LTTE bases codenamed *Ramesh* and *Yankee* in the jungle areas north of Palamoddai after heavy fighting with over 400 Tiger guerrillas.

In the ten-day operation, defence sources say over 200 Tiger cadres and 25 soldiers were killed and another 83 soldiers wounded. No civilian casualty figures were given. The Army has retreated to Nochchimoddai setting up a checkpoint for civilians coming south at Kokkuveli, two miles north of Thandikulam where Tamils moving north are screened.

Damage between Thandikulam and Omanthai is extensive, the road littered with hulks of burnt-out food lorries and over 1,000 wrecked bicycles left by civilians who ply the hazardous supply route from Jaffna to Vavuniya. Over 1,000 bags of rice were burned at Omanthai Cooperative Stores and another 25,000 bags in surrounding towns and villages. All pub-

lic buildings and large houses have been burned down or wrecked. A weekly food convoy to 25,000 refugees at the UNHCR camp at Madhu was reinstated on 10 May but sources say ten people have died through lack of medical supplies.

In Mannar, Army operations intensified after LTTE attacks on Mantai and on Puvarasankulam east of Madhu. Three LTTE cadre were killed when naval patrols destroyed a speedboat off Pesalai in mid-May.

As operations ceased in Vavuniya, three days of aerial bombing commenced in Jaffna causing widespread casualties. After a LTTE suicide launch packed with explosives rammed the 3,000 ton naval vessel *Abitha*, off Point Pedro killing five sailors on 4 May there has been heavy shelling on many parts of the peninsula. Sources say the Army's new 130mm artillery installed at Karaitivu and Kayts with a range of 27 kms has taken a heavy toll.

Relief workers are struggling to empty schools of refugees, both to restore Jaffna's shattered education system and to minimise the risk of heavy casualties. Karaitivu Island is now fully under Army control after surviving a LTTE siege last month and sources say repairs to the Punnalai causeway are a prelude to an Army assault on the peninsula.

Following a three-day unilateral ceasefire called by the Army for the Buddhist *Vesak* festival, over 5,000 civilians from the North poured into Vavuniya seeking food supplies. After 30 days of Army operations in the last two months much of the North is again close to starvation. The Army's scorched earth tactics around Omanthai only serve to tighten the screw.

Armoury

In a Supplementary Estimate to this year's defence budget tabled in Parliament in early May, the Government says it will spend a further \$75 million on arms and ammunition. The 1991 defence budget now totals \$370 million.

No hiding place

Bank clerk Kesal Tudawe appeared in Colombo High Court on 15 May accused of harbouring the late JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera in safe houses between May 1984 and April 1985. Wijeweera was killed while in police custody in November 1990.

Targets

Over 400 Tamils from Kumarawatte Estate are still stranded in Passara High School, seeking refuge from communal riots that followed a LTTE massacre of 23 Sinhalese villagers in remote Moneragala last month.

Amnesty mission

There will be no restrictions on an Amnesty International mission which arrives in Colombo in late May, says International Affairs Adviser Bradman Weerakoon. The mission will have free access to prisons, lawyers and NGOs says Mr Weerakoon and has asked to visit Batticaloa. Visits to the north will require further Government approval.

Search and destroy

Sri Lankan naval patrol boats killed 35 LTTE cadres and destroyed 11 Tiger craft, many carrying fuel and ammunition in separate incidents in the Palk Strait this month, as the crackdown intensifies on LTTE supply lines to south India, defence sources say.

Letter from Mullaitivu

MULLAITIVU, just south of the Jaffna peninsula on Sri Lanka's north-east coast is the forgotten casualty of the June war. Isolated and underdeveloped, it is last on everyone's list for assistance.

Over 50,000 of the district's 90,000 inhabitants are refugees huddled in churches, temples and schools. Many have fled to Pudukudiyiruppu, to escape LTTE attacks on Mullaitivu town and the inevitable reprisal shelling from the Army base in the town centre. There are also four camps of refugees from Trincomalee who fled at the start of the June war

and a daily influx of other East Coast Tamils fleeing, despite the horror and the hardships, into Jaffna. Pudukudiyiruppu has become a way-station for those who prefer the bombers to the death squads.

Over 60% of Mullaitivu people are subsistence farmers starved of seed grain and fertiliser inputs. There will be no harvest this year. There are over 10,000 fishing families in villages like Selvapuram, Kallapaddu and Vannankulam who have lost their livelihood. Boats and nets have been bombed and the seas teem with Sri Lankan naval patrols.

There is only one Government food convoy a month and NGOs and church agencies can offer only limited assistance. When a convoy of twenty lorries broke through to Mullaitivu in mid-May after the Omanthai offensive there were serious food shortages and no drugs or medicines in Pudukudiyiruppu hospital.

Many East Coast refugees do not qualify for the Rs400 a month relief package and many who do, have received nothing. Every day there are more mouths to feed in Mullaitivu and fewer reasons for hope as the war closes in.

Thousands held in Army roundups in the East

TWO major Army operations south of Batticaloa in mid-May caused chaos in the East as thousands of civilians were rounded up and many more fled the fighting.

In a three-day offensive in the Kaluvanchikudi area, defence sources say six LTTE camps were destroyed and large quantities of arms and ammunition recovered. Helicopter gunships strafed a Tiger communications centre at Addalichchenai and 15 LTTE cadre were killed, some while escaping across Batticaloa lagoon. There were extensive cordon-and-search operations in villages in the Paduvankarai area and local people were arrested.

Communal tensions remain high. A relief committee of Opposition parties visiting Batticaloa said refugees were being pushed back to their villages by the

Army to enforce a semblance of normalcy. Tamils living close to Muslim villages have refused to return without Army protection.

Abductions and disappearances continue. Four youths were abducted from Kannan village near Valaichenai by masked men who knew their names. Two bodies were later found near the river with their eyes gouged out.

The Tigers are slowly infiltrating Sinhalese areas on the Polonnaruwa border. Some 13 soldiers of a Special Forces Brigade were wounded in an attack on two LTTE camps in the Trikonamadu jungles in early May.

As operations got underway in Batticaloa, over 3,000 people were rounded up by security forces on 19 May from villages in the Kalmunai and Thirukovil divisions of Amparai District. They were held for

over a week in Kanchikudicharu Army camp and screened by masked informers. Civilians say some units of the commando Special Task Force (STF) operating in Amparai will give comprehensive lists of those detained, while Citizens Committees still struggle with the Army in Batticaloa to prevent disappearances in custody.

The Army again closed all the Tamil shops in Akkaraipatru in early May as merchants were accused of supplying the LTTE. Buyers are now restricted to limited quantities and the Army clearly means to break the supply conduit from the people to the guerrillas. Prices have rocketed - potatoes over Rs 50 a kilo - and fixed price staples like rice are now sold on the black market.

The STF who are intensifying operations in Thirukovil captured five LTTE cadre a few miles south of Vinayagapuram, who had reportedly come in search of food. Three Tigers were killed by STF units in a failed landmine ambush at Sogama on 16 May.

The road from coastal Karativu to Ampara town remains a death trap. Nine Muslim farmers returning from their fields were killed in a LTTE ambush near Malwatte on 20 May. A two-day search operation by Army and STF personnel followed. After similar operations in the last weeks, Malwatte Citizens Committee says 102 Tamils have disappeared from the town and nearby Veeramunai. The Committee has appealed to President Premadasa to intervene.

MP urges UN intervention in Trincomalee

TAMIL MP Mavai Senathirajah has called for international relief agencies to intervene in Trincomalee after continuing reports of disappearances and starvation in the district. In an urgent letter of appeal to President Premadasa, Mr Senathirajah says a number of young women were arrested from a refugee camp near Muthur and have disappeared. People in some areas are starving says the TULF MP after seven District Cooperative managers were killed and the Army are holding back relief supplies. He wants refugee camps in the district to be supervised by international refugee agency UNHCR or the ICRC.

The Army's response has been to order 4,000 villagers in the Muthur area - where the Tigers have also abducted informers - to leave their homes and go to the notorious Clappenberg refugee camp in Trincomalee already overcrowded and insanitary. Disappearances from Clappenberg continue and those arrested are taken to Plantain Point.

TULF MPs and representatives of Tamil group PLOTE met government officials in Colombo on 20 May to highlight the continuing colonisation of Tamil areas of Trincomalee with Sinhalese settlers. Parts of Trincomalee town, temple lands in Sampalativu and Muslim sections of Uppuveli have been appropriated. The forcing of Sinhalese refugees into Tamil areas would seriously jeopardise the peace process said PLOTE spokesman Karavai Kandasamy.

In outlying areas of Trincomalee District, the Tigers continue to hold sway especially in the north along the Mullaitivu border. Ignoring a three-day ceasefire in late May, Tiger units killed eight soldiers in a landmine ambush outside Pulmoddai.

Colombo on edge

THERE is growing tension in Colombo following the suspected LTTE bomb blast that killed Defence Minister Ranjan Wijeratne on 2 March, and the continued influx of Tamils fleeing deteriorating conditions in the North and East.

The authorities fear LTTE hit squads are secreted among thousands of young people who have fled the Tamil areas and live a twilight existence in cheap lodging houses or are hidden by relatives.

Police have warned that all new or temporary residents in Colombo homes must be registered at local police stations. Failure to comply means arrest under Emergency Regulation 21A and that the occupants have something to hide.

The alleged involvement of the LTTE in Rajiv Gandhi's killing has heightened the hysteria. There is a rash of speculation

in the press and young Tamils in Colombo are increasingly fearful. A woman chemistry teacher living in Colombo was named as the dead assassin by Indian newspapers and was only later cleared by an *Indian Express* reporter.

Police arrested eight Tamil girls from the North and East in a Wellawatte boarding house after finding a kilo of heroin in their landlady's room. The girls were later released but police believe the house is part of an "arms for drugs" syndicate run by the LTTE in Singapore.

Certain Colombo "travel agencies" who specialise in supplying forged visas and air tickets for young Tamils seeking asylum in the West are doing a roaring trade and several fortunes are being made, observers say. The going rate is around Rs 300,000 (\$7,000).

British envoy expelled over election complaint

BRITAIN's senior diplomat in Sri Lanka, High Commissioner David Gladstone has been declared *persona non grata* and asked to leave the country after what the Government describes as "unwarranted interference" in the local elections on 11 May.

Mr Gladstone reported accusations of electoral intimidation and impersonation by ruling United National Party (UNP) supporters to Dikwella police in Matara District on behalf of local people.

Mr Gladstone has been a persistent critic of Sri Lanka's human rights record especially in the south, where NGOs estimate 60,000 people have disappeared since 1987 in the brutal struggle between security forces and the Sinhalese marxist insurgent People's Liberation Front (JVP).

No deadline has been set for Mr Gladstone's expulsion, but Britain has cancelled a visit to Colombo in July by Foreign Office junior minister Mark Lennox Boyd.

President Premadasa's UNP swept to a landslide victory in the local elections securing control of 190 of 237 rural and

municipal councils. The main opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) won only 36 councils mostly in rural areas although they won 35% of votes cast to the UNP's 51%.

SLFP National Organiser Anura Bandaranaike arrested during polling at Keregala, said the SLFP must now undergo a total overhaul and come up with clear-cut policies. The Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) who won none of the 65 seats it contested, said thousands of SLMC supporters had been removed from the electoral register in Colombo and alleged widespread intimidation in Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Matale.

Despite 141 incidents of violence and over 200 reports of polls violations, an International Observers Group including two British MPs declared the elections free and fair. Opposition MPs say the Group visited only 286 out of 10,000 polling booths and have asked why its 24-page report is not made public.

Observers say Mr Premadasa won two important victories in these elections. He continues to remould the party in his own

image and many of the new councillors are working class and street-smart rather than the sons of the old elite. Secondly, the feared backlash in JVP-dominated districts did not materialise and the UNP took most of the south, apart from pockets in Kalutara, Hambantota and Ratnapura. Rural conservatism and the search for stability won out over revolution and revenge. Others say Mr Premadasa's party machine is already indistinguishable from the civil administration in rural areas and has a long and powerful reach.

Analysts say the JVP is down, but not out and the dance of death with the security forces continues. Police found seven charred and bullet-ridden bodies near Dombemada on the Kurunegala road on 8 May.

Another six detainees of the 13,000 held in the wake of the JVP revolt have disappeared from Boossa Detention Camp, lawyer Dharmadasa Gomez told the High Court on 10 May. A JVP bomb killed three and wounded 22 people during a *Vesak* celebration in Galle on 28 May.

Balancing the books

IN ITS ANNUAL REPORT for 1990 released in early May, Sri Lanka's Central Bank commended a "formidable" 6.6% growth in the economy but warned of the social impact of rising prices and a 21% rate of inflation.

Agricultural export earnings rose by 11% and industrial exports by 24%, bolstered by \$625 million from textile and garment sales. Earnings from tourism also grew substantially last year - about 700% - but economists say growth figures are misleading in being compared to the low outputs of the last five years of civil unrest.

Tea production, a substantial export earner, rose by 12.6% this year to 233 million kgs only 2% higher than the 1965 figure. Rice production up 23% this year is 5% lower than the 1985 yield.

Analysts say it is only through a capital account input of 297 million SDR - the IMF's international reserve currency measure - in aid grants and investment that a 177 million SDR current account deficit has been transformed into a balance of payments surplus.

There also fears that Sri Lanka's high export earnings in the garment sector will

be eroded when the current Multi Fibre Arrangement granting Third World countries favourable export terms is reviewed after the current round of GATT talks.

Colombo's Consumer Price Index says inflation has dropped to 14% this year but prices continue to rise say opposition politicians. The Central Bank's report

THE SRI LANKA MONITOR is part of an information processing service set up by the British Refugee Council to keep Sri Lankan refugees in Britain, Europe and elsewhere, informed about the current situation in their home areas.

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warns that continuing inflation will evaporate the economic gains of the last two years and may throw Sri Lanka's ambitious Poverty Alleviation Programme, *Janasaviya*, off-course.

President Premadasa launched a revamped version of the *Janasaviya* programme in Colombo on 25 May, funded by an initial \$57 million from the World Bank's International Development Association. The original *Janasaviya* programme was heavily criticised by the World Bank and has been reformulated to target the poorest more effectively.

The *Janasaviya* Trust Fund will run four programmes: a rural credit programme for the poor, an agribusiness training programme, a rural job creation scheme and a nutrition programme for mothers and children.

The programmes will be implemented by NGOs and observers say the current Presidential Commission on NGOs also serves to identify a pool of client NGOs for *Janasaviya*, willing to adhere to tight Government guidelines. Foreign NGOs who do not adhere to Government guidelines, warned the President will be "thrown out on their ear".