

**'I tried to get rid of bodyguards'**

PARIS, May 22: Former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi said in an interview eight days before his death he had tried to reduce the number of bodyguards protecting him, reports Reuter.

Asked by a correspondent of the Daily Liberation if he had done so to feel closer to the people, Gandhi replied: "I tried to get rid of them (bodyguards). There is less security this time, but it is better."

The interview took place on May 14 while Gandhi was on a campaign tour in Uttar Pradesh in northern India.

Gandhi, killed on Tuesday by a bomb hidden in a bouquet of flowers, warned that promises by the rival Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to turn India into a Hindu state were a trap.

"It's trap that the BJP is setting for the people, a trap that is not very different from the one the Germans fell into with (Adolf) Hitler," he said.

"What is at stake here are the very foundations of the nation, secularism for example," he said. "If we fail in this task as a nation, the model we've built will crumble," he said.

"That we will need a new model, and I don't think another one exists that can safeguard the country's unity."

Opinion polls taken just before Gandhi's assassination were unanimous in predicting that his Congress would remain the biggest party after India's current General Election.

**An Eye-witness Account**  
**Rajiv's smiling face blown off by bomb, body mutilated**

MADRAS (India), May 22: Former Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi was accepting floral garlands from cheering crowds and waving at them when a sudden blast decapitated him Tuesday, eyewitnesses said, reports AFP.

Mr Gandhi, 47, was all smiles as he slowly made his way to a makeshift platform at Sriperumpudur, a tiny town 50 kilometres (31 miles) from here, when the deafening explosion occurred, two witnesses said.

**Rahul in London on way to India**

LONDON, May 22: Rajiv Gandhi's 17-year-old son, Rahul, arrived here today on a stopover from the United States and was due to leave on a British Airways flight for India later in the day, officials said, reports AFP.

Mr Gandhi was met at London's Heathrow airport by officials from the foreign office and was escorted to the airport's VIP lounge to await his flight.

He arrived in Britain on a flight from Boston, Massachusetts, where he was studying.

One of them a journalist based here, said up to 20 others were also killed in the blast.

Nobody initially seemed to know what happened, said the journalist, who works for an English-language newspaper here, then one man began screaming in Tamil they have killed Rajiv Gandhi, they have killed Rajiv Gandhi.

A photographer for a Tamil Daily said a part of Gandhi's face, "which until then was all smiles, was blown off by the explosion and his clothes were torn and covered with blood."

The photographer said he was some 25 feet (7.5 metres) away from Gandhi when he died.

I saw one head fly over our head. I don't know whose (head) it was. My (newspaper's) reporter got blood on his shirt from that flying head, he said.

He said Gandhi's body was identified by his sports shoes.

The body was upside down. There was dust and blood on him a policeman lifted his smashed head to see if it was Mr Gandhi. The clothes were all torn. But his sports shoes were there, the photographer added.

The shaken journalist who was a little further away, said the explosion was "massive."

There was confusion all around and people began running all over. It was a near stampede. Nobody initially seemed to know what happened. She said.

The journalist said police immediately ringed the blast site, a large park, and refused to let reporters near Gandhi's body.

Among those killed was a superintendent of police, but she said she did not know who the other victims were.

The photographer said more than 10,000 people had gathered at Sriperumpudur to hear him and they began shouting slogans in Tamil hailing Gandhi when he stepped out of his car with local leaders of his Congress (I)



NEW DELHI: The coffin bearing the remains of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is carried from an air force plane May 22.

Photo—AFP/UNB

party.

Many in the crowd hurled silk shawls at him in the traditional Tamil way of greeting.

Gandhi had flown in here at 8.30 pm (1600 GMT) from neighbouring Andhra Pradesh state for a two-day election tour of Tamil Nadu, a coastal state of 55 million divided from Sri Lanka by a narrow strip of sea.

The witnesses said several people garlanded him and Gandhi himself garlanded a statue of his mother Indira, slain six and a half years ago, before reaching the site of the proposed public meeting.

**We won't seek advantage, says Pak army**

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, May 22: The Pakistan army said Wednesday it would not seek military advantage as India recovers from the shocking assassination of its former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, reports AP.

A stunned Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said he would attend funeral services for Gandhi, who was assassinated by a bomb while campaigning in southern India.

"We are saddened by the passing away, under such tragic circumstances, of an important and distinguished political leader of our region," Sharif said in a statement released early Wednesday by Pakistan's state-run news agency.

Gandhi, 46, was killed late Tuesday when a bomb ripped through a rally site in the town of Sriperambudur in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Within hours of Gandhi's death, the Indian security force along its troubled border with Pakistan was ordered to increase its vigil, apparently as a precaution and warning to India's hostilities. But a Pakistani army spokesman said, "Pakistan would never be adventuresome in this or any other situation. There is enough trouble on the border as it is."

The official, who cannot be identified under normal briefing rules, said Pakistan had also ordered its troops on alert after President Gen. Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq was killed in a mysterious plane crash in 1988.

"After our tragedy of Aug 17 we did a similar thing. We are not seeing too much into this thing. We are not expecting any trouble on account of this," he said.

Traditionally uneasy neighbours, Pakistan and India have three times gone to war since 1947 when the subcontinent was divided between mostly Hindu India and predominantly Muslim Pakistan.

In 1948 and again in 1965 they fought over the disputed Himalayan state of Kashmir, and in 1971 over Bangladesh, then East Pakistan.

**Ethiopian peace talks in London next week**

ADDIS ABABA, May 22: Ethiopian military strongman Mengistu Haile Mariam flew to exile after 14 years of brutal rule, and effectively challenged rebels surrounding the capital to negotiate an end to civil war, reports Reuter.

His once-powerful Mengistu, a lonely figure huddled in the back of a car, was driven to Addis Ababa airport with just two police motorcycle escorts. He flew to Nairobi, apparently on the way to sanctuary in Zimbabwe where his wife has already arrived.

Government and rebel leaders meet for peace talks next week in London.

The government, with former vice-president Tesfaye Gabre Kidan acting as head of state, said Mengistu had fled to avoid further bloodshed in civil war which have dragged on for decades.

State television said on Tuesday evening Tesfaye chaired a meeting of the country's two highest authorities, the council of the state and the politburo of the ruling party, which called for an immediate ceasefire.

But during Gandhi's 1984-89 term as Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy the two countries edged a little closer together.

Relations plummeted in January 1990 when India launched a military crackdown on Muslim militants waging a bloody secessionist movement

in Jammu-Kashmir, the only majority Muslim Indian state. India accuses Pakistan of fomenting trouble in Kashmir, which was divided between the two nations at the time of partition. Pakistan denies the charge and wants a United Nations-monitored plebiscite to decide the region's fate.

**Bomb was hidden in a bouquet of flowers**

NEW DELHI, May 22: The bomb that killed former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was hidden in a bouquet of flowers handed to him as he began an election campaign meeting, Congress Party spokesman Pranab Mukherjee said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Mukherjee said the bomb exploded as Gandhi, who was head of the Congress Party, was heading for the data at an election rally in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

was accepting garlands of flowers and bouquets offered by supporters as he approached the data during the rally for this week's three-phase elections which began on Monday.

Mukherjee said it was not clear if the assassin was also killed in the blast.

"Fourteen people were killed and it's difficult to tell precisely right now if he was also blown up because the bodies were badly mutilated," he told Reuter by telephone.



NEW DELHI: This is a October 12, 1984 file photo of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi speaking with his mother Indira 19 days before her assassination Rajiv Gandhi, 47, was killed in a bomb attack May 21 in the southern Indian province of Tamil Nadu.

Photo—AFP/UNB

**Asia-Pacific leaders stunned, shocked**

UNDATED, May 22: The Asia-Pacific Regions shocked and saddened by the overnight bomb slaying of former Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi, but some leaders said India's democracy could overcome the loss, reports AFP.

**Japan**  
In Tokyo, Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu expressed "heartfelt deep condolences" and called the late premier a "respected man who had contributed to improving relations between Japan and India."

**China**  
In Beijing, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said Chinese Premier Li Peng had sent a message of condolence to Indian Premier Chandra Shekhar, adding that Beijing was "shocked to learn the tragic news."

**Australia**  
Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke, in Canberra, praised Gandhi as a courageous man who had accepted the threat of assassination as part of his job.

**Pakistan**  
The first country in the region to react was Pakistan, whose Foreign Secretary expressed "profound shock and grief at the terrible tragedy that has taken place."

**Sri Lanka**  
Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa, speaking in Colombo, condemned the assassination as a "barbaric and dastardly act" and expressed sympathy to the bereaved family.

**Nepal**  
In Kathmandu, Premier Krishna Prasad Bhattarai said the "entire Nepalese people and myself are deeply saddened by the tragic death" of Gandhi, whom he described as "great leader" of south Asia.

**Philippines**  
In Manila, Philippine Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus described the assassination as a "serious setback" to democracy across the world.

**BRIEFLY**

**ROK PM offers resignation:** South Korean Prime Minister Ro Jai-Bong offered his resignation to President Roh Tae-Woo Wednesday his political secretary said, Reuter reports from Seoul.

Ro has been under pressure to quit since the police killing of a student demonstrator on April 26 sparked violent protests.

It was not immediately clear whether the President would accept the resignation by the semi official Yonhap news agency said the cabinet would be reshuffled soon.

**PLO team to visit Damascus:** A senior PLO delegation will visit Damascus on Saturday for talks with Syrian leaders on the normalisation of relations after a rift dating back to 1983, a PLO source in Tunis said on Tuesday, Reuter reports from Tunis.

The delegation led by Farouq Kaddoumi Head of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's Political Department will include Suleiman Najeb and Yasser Abed-Rabbo both members of the PLO Executive Committee.

It will be the first official visit of Syria by a PLO delegation since 1988 after a rift dating back to 1983.

Kaddoumi conferred with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shara in Cairo last week while attending a meeting of Arab League Foreign Ministers.

**UNGA chief to start 4-nation tour:** General Assembly President Guido de Marco will visit the Soviet Union, China and North and South Korea this month, a UN spokesman said on Tuesday, Reuter report from United Nations.

De Marco, who will also be travelling in his capacity as Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Malta, is due in Moscow on Wednesday and leaves for Beijing on Thursday.

He flies on to Pyongyang on May 28 and to Seoul on May 30.

**Three killed in Allahabad violence:** Three people were killed in violence in Rajiv Gandhi's home city of Allahabad hours after the assassination of the former Prime Minister, national television reported Wednesday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

Twelve others were injured in the violence which erupted as news of Gandhi's death Tuesday night in a powerful bomb explosion spread in Allahabad, 800 kilometers (497 miles) east of here, the television said.

**Cheney defends arms sales to Riyadh:** Defense Secretary Dick Cheney Tuesday defended a seven billion dollar US arms shipment to Saudi Arabia, saying the United States wanted to control the flow of arms to the Middle East but not ban it outright, AFP reports from Washington.

Cheney said President George Bush was "interested in trying to find ways to control the flow of arms, that we are especially interested in weapons of mass destruction and technologies that lend themselves to that kind of capability."

He told a Senate subcommittee the administration of President George Bush was also concerned about conventional weapons but "that does not mean... a total prohibition on arms sales."



NEW DELHI: Rajiv Gandhi's wife Sonia (L) and teenage daughter Priyanka (R) climb in a limousine as they head for the New Delhi airport in order to fly down to Madras area where former Prime Minister was assassinated May 21.

**Rajiv Gandhi's last interview**

**'People frustrated as system is not meeting their aspirations'**

NEW YORK, May 22: Minutes before he was killed by a bomb, former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was asked in his final interview if he was afraid of his new, open style of campaigning, reports Reuter.

"What else can I do?" he replied to New York Times Reporter Barbara Crossette, who rode with him in his car en route to a campaign stop in Sriperumbudur.

"I campaigned this way before I was Prime Minister. I'm not Prime Minister now so I'm campaigning this way again," he said.

A minute or two after stepping out of the bullet-proof car Gandhi was dead, killed by a powerful bomb hidden in a bouquet of flowers.

All that was left of his body were his head and his feet, still wearing the expensive running shoes he had recently taken to for long days spent campaigning, according to his driver, the first on the scene.

In a dramatic account of Gandhi's last seconds as he walked toward a platform erected for the occasion Crossette wrote: "There was a sudden burst of what sounded like

firecrackers and then a loud boom, an explosion and a cloud of smoke that scattered people all around.

"It was all over in a matter of seconds. The crowd at first froze and then began to stampede."

During the final ride, Gandhi spoke of his fatigue at the seemingly endless campaigning. "At the end (of each day) I am swollen and bleeding or have a cut arm... There is this cheek pinching. And sometimes in Muslim neighbourhoods they kiss me — you know, one, two, three times."

He spoke about India and where its political turmoil was leading it, Crossette wrote. Although he also agreed that the growth of strong new political parties indicated a democratic coming of age in India, he had reservations.

"I feel these are the wrong kind of parties," he said, referring to right wing, pro-Hindu groups such as the Bharatiya Janata Party, which has aroused religious passions among Hindus, India's majority.

"A tremendous frustration is building up in the people, which is causing these swings

from one party to another. They are frustrated that the system is not delivering, not meeting their aspirations."

Gandhi said he thought his Congress Party had tried to bring the high expectations for India after its independence from Britain "down to a kind of realistic level."

"But we have so much more to do. We have to make the system more efficient."

He said four things were needed in India: "We need education for the woman, the girl child. We need a good job for everybody. We need child and maternal health care. And we need overall economic growth."

**Third violent death in Nehru family**

SRIPERUMBUDUR, May 22: The killing of Rajiv Gandhi marks the third violent death in the Nehru family within a decade, reports PTI.

Sanjay Gandhi, who was introduced to the political arena by the late Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, nearly a decade before her elder son Rajiv, died in a plane crash

The government must act so that the result is family planning, which would follow these things."

Above all he was determined to "kill all controversies over religion," he said.

Asked how he thought he would get on with new Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Gandhi said they had not met and he could not speculate on their relationship.

But he said former President Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq, who was killed in a plane crash in 1988, "could have solved these problems with us."

"We were close to finishing agreement on Kashmir... and then he was killed," Gandhi said.

He said there was evidence Zia was murdered but would not elaborate, the Times said.

Another reporter who was in his car asked if Gandhi thought Indian leaders might be targets as the country took on a larger regional profile. He agreed, but said the Soviet Union was no threat as it had too many problems of its own.

"Are you talking about the CIA again?" Crossette asked. Gandhi smirked in response to the question.

**Off the Record**

**Born in thatched hut**

PYONGYANG: He was born in a thatched hut and now lives in a marble palace, worshipped by his people as the "Great Leader," reports Reuter.

That much is known about North Korean President Kim Il-Sung, among the very last of the world's hardline communist leaders whose personality cult has been taken to heights unknown since Soviet dictator Josef Stalin or China's Mao Tse-tung.

As for the rest, take your pick from propaganda, what the prying eyes of resident diplomats in Pyongyang can see, and pure speculation about the country's President since 1948.

Don't bother to ask North Koreans about Kim's personal life.

"It's impolite to ask such questions," said one official, like every Korean adult wearing a Kim Il-Sung lapel badge. "In North Korea we don't talk about the individual."

Don't imagine he will end up like his former ally Nicolae Ceaucescu of Romania, a crumpled body in front of a firing squad.

"There is no dissent here," one diplomat said. "Some people believe in God, and some believe in Kim Il-Sung."

The elder Kim lives opulently just minutes by car from the centre of Pyongyang in a palace circled by a moat and reached by a sweeping driveway decorated with playing fountains.

Pheasants and red-crested cranes wander freely over expanses of manicured lawns.

**Miracles from S. Arabia**

WASHINGTON: The ban on alcohol in Saudi Arabia cut down on U.S. military discipline problems, accidental deaths and absenteeism during the Gulf war, a Defence Department spokesman said, reports Reuter.

He said returning U.S. officers agreed with British Gulf war Commander General Sir Peter de La Billiere, who told a parliamentary committee in London the alcohol ban had been an unexpected boon for discipline among British troops.

"I've heard the same thing for U.S. forces," Major Doug Hart said in response to De La Billiere's comments. They said a lot of problems associated with alcohol consumption didn't take place — fighting among troops and absenteeism."

Hart also said accidental deaths among U.S. soldiers from car crashes were remarkably low because of the alcohol ban.

Many returning troops said the prohibition on alcohol had helped them lose weight during the Gulf war and got them into better physical condition.

**Sakharov now a darling of Kremlin**

MOSCOW: Soviet political leaders and foreign dignitaries Tuesday hailed late dissident leader Andrei Sakharov, long reviled by the Kremlin as a traitor, as one of the great figures of the 20th century, reports Reuter.

In a public ceremony on Moscow's busy Ring Road marking the 70th anniversary of the Nobel laureate's birth, deputy mayor Sergei Stankievich unveiled a memorial plaque on the wall of the house where Sakharov lived and died.

"Sakharov was one of the great figures of the 20th century," said Stankievich.

"He saved our honour," declared the Izvestia newspaper in a front-page headline. The Communist Party daily Pravda, which in the past regularly printed bitter denunciations for the Physicist, said he helped prepare for a new Soviet Union.

Prize-winning writer Oles Adamovich compared Sakharov with fellow Physicist and Mathematician Albert Einstein, also a Nobel peace prize winner.

"The totalitarianism of Nazi Germany could not destroy Einstein, and our Soviet totalitarianism did not break Sakharov," declared Adamovich to applause from several hundred Muscovites who gathered for the ceremony.