

# Simple electrical switching device used to activate killer bomb?

MADRAS, May 24 : Police investigating the bomb blast at Sriperumpudur, near Madras, which killed Rajiv Gandhi on Tuesday night, are working on a new theory that a simple switching device was used to activate the bomb strapped to the suicide squad's back.

Police sources told PTI here today that earlier speculation that a remote control device was used to detonate the bomb might be off the mark as it would be difficult for the woman to carry both the bomb and remote control device on her person.

The suicide squad theory has gained ground with recovery of some pieces of a belt which, police felt, must have been strapped to the back of the woman to hold the explosives.

Police sources said a person determined to commit suicide in the blast attempt must have found it easier to use a switch with a simple mechanism to immediately detonate the bomb on gaining access to Gandhi.

Police sources said the switch would have to be merely shifted on the 'On' position to bring about an immediate explosion.

The woman must have been

waiting for an opportunity to come near Gandhi and, the moment she did so, had changed the switch, to the 'On' position, the resultant blast instantaneously killing her along with Gandhi, so goes this theory which according to the sources, is the most plausible one.

According to sketchy reports reaching police, some eye-witnesses have described the woman with dark complexion and dressed in a shalwar-kameez which might have been chosen to conceal the belt with the explosives and the switch.

However, the sources said the investigators had an 'open mind' and had not ruled out the possibilities, like involvement of one or two persons in the blast, or concealment of a bomb in a bouquet or a gift-box offered to Gandhi.

## Mercenary approached

The Indian High Commission is checking with the British authorities the antecedents of a British mercenary who claimed that some people had approached him about two months ago to carry out the assassination of Gandhi according to a message from London.

One Kevin Mason (53), who claims to be an ex-Special Air Services personnel trained in the use of explosives, told the Indian High Commission officials and the Indian media in London that he had held a couple of meetings with these people in a central London hotel in Kensington and demanded half a million pounds to execute the operations.

Those people had offered him only 100,000 pounds and wanted the assassination to be carried out at the time of the mid-term election in India in

the month of May. The deal fell through and he reported the matter to his friends in the British intelligence, Mason said.

Mason who spoke to the High Commission officials and the Indian media over telephone in the past two days said Britain was the 'main place' for supply of arms to mercenaries and it was quite possible that the people who wanted to kill Gandhi might have approached some other British mercenaries like him.

He claimed having worked

as a mercenary in the Middle East and some countries in southern America.

The ex-SAS man said "I am a mercenary and can undertake such operations in other parts of the world. But I can't break the British law as I am a British citizen." He claimed to have trained, along with several other ex-SAS personnel, some militant groups.

According to him Rajiv's killers might have used a powerful Semtex time device or a powerful remote-controlled bomb.

## Rajiv's killing will have no impact on polls: Basu

CALCUTTA, May 24: West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu has expressed the view here last night that the brutal assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi will have 'no impact' in the later phase of Lok Sabha and assembly polls, reports PTI.

Basu, who arrived here from Delhi was talking to newsmen at Calcutta airport.

When asked whether canards by politicians against each other were partly responsible for such assassination, Basu said, "It is not a non-violent country. It has made to be non-violent."

When asked whether there is a possibility of 'national government' in case of a hung parliament after the poll, Basu said "India is a country where parliamentary democracy prevails. The government is formed through election. Why a national government would be formed?" he asked.

## A handsome face turned hideous

MADRAS, May 24: The face of Rajiv Gandhi, widely regarded as handsome, turned hideous with the powerful bomb ripping off most part of his face and skull.

A PTI correspondent who was among the first to find Gandhi's body among the heap of bodies at Sriperumpudur found only some black spots to mark his eye-sockets, and some blotches of semi-solid pieces of flesh, with blood oozing out, to mark the rest of his face.



MADRAS-A clandestine arms factory somewhere in Tamil Nadu: a gun-for-a-gun situation.

## BJP power crazy, says Pranab Mukherjee

# Renewed pleas to Sonia to accept party presidency

NEW DELHI, May 24: Several Congress (I) leaders including half a dozen former Pradesh Congress (I) Presidents yesterday urged Mrs Sonia Gandhi to accept the presidency of the Congress (I) "at this critical juncture," reports PTI.

In a joint statement here, they said the Congress (I) Working Committee's decision to nominate Mrs Sonia Gandhi to succeed Rajiv Gandhi reflected the wishes and aspirations of all Congressmen.

Stating that the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi was the culmination of a long campaign of the divisive, communal and reactionary forces, they appealed to the people to remain united to preserve the country's unity and integrity.

The signatories to the statement included: Tariq Anwar (Bihar), Digvijay Singh (MP), Ashok Gehlot

(Rajasthan), Ahmad Patel (Gujarat), all former PCC chiefs and Vilas Muttemwar and Akbar Ahmad Dumpty.

Selection of the party president was an internal affair of the party and we refuse to entertain any gratuitous comment from rivals the Congress-I said yesterday.

Criticising the Bharatiya Janata Party for its comments on the party's decision to make Mrs Sonia Gandhi the president of the party, Congress (I) spokesman Pranab Mukherjee asked, The BJP is so power crazy that it cannot put a halt to its relentless political activity while the nation mourned the death of a former prime minister.

The attitude of the BJP even at this juncture confirmed that BJP would use religion or any other issue to advance its political interest, Mukherjee said.

AFP adds: New Delhi police warned Thursday they would arrest those spreading rumours that ministers and politicians were being attacked or detained in the aftermath of the assassination of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

"Anyone found spreading rumours will be arrested without warrant," the police said in a bulletin Thursday as wild rumours of detentions, lynchings and attacks circulated through the capital.

State-run Doordarshan television station, which reaches 100 million Indian viewers, repeated denials that present or former ministers and politicians had been arrested or died in the wake of Gandhi's death.

"All these are sinister attempts at disinformation and people should not be provoked. The reports are untrue," Doordarshan said quot-

ing a government spokesman as telephone in news offices rang non-stop with enquiries.

The police also summoned reporters and issued the warning that it would not hesitate to arrest troublemakers and deal sternly with them.

The hundreds that called newspapers offices Thursday asked for confirmation of rumours that several ministers belonging to the previous government of Vishwanath Pratap Singh had been taken into custody or attacked in a violent backlash.

Angry mourners attacked the Delhi official home of VP Singh's ministerial colleague, Ram Bilas Paswan, Wednesday but no other major incident had been confirmed by police.

VP Singh quit Gandhi's government in 1987 accusing him of corruption and beat him in the last elections in 1989.

# Assassination to affect ties: Sharif

NEW DELHI, May 24: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said today the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi will certainly affect relations with India, reports Reuter.

Sharif told reporters after arriving for Gandhi's funeral that he favoured talks with Delhi on all outstanding issues and that the two countries could not afford growing tension in their relations.

The Indian and Pakistan armies have recently fought artillery duels and skirmishes along the ceasefire line that divides the disputed territory of Kashmir.

Sharif, on his first visit to India, since coming to power

last December, said he would discuss bilateral issues with caretaker Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar later today.

Pakistan denies Indian charges that it arms and trains the Muslim gunmen trying to wrest Jammu and Kashmir state from India.

Gandhi's death in a bomb blast at a campaign rally on Tuesday night has caused some apprehension in Pakistan as the country ponders the end of an Indian political dynasty seen as essentially anti-Pakistan.

"If I was to sum up the feeling of the government today I would say it was one of concern and apprehension," a senior official in Islamabad said this week.

# 11 killed in wake of assassination

NEW DELHI, May 24: At least 11 people were killed since Tuesday in violent incidents in the wake of assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, Union Minister of State for Home Subodh Kant Sahay said yesterday, reports PTI.

He told newsmen the deaths occurred in states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal in sporadic violence. While six died in police firings, the rest were killed in violence.

Sahay said the government had been able to 'contain' the law and order situation in the country which could have deteriorated had strict and immediate measures were not taken.

He said the law and order situation throughout the country particularly in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu was peaceful yesterday.

He said curfew had been relaxed in Hyderabad and

Vishakapatnam areas. State buses had started playing and suburban train services have been restored, the minister said.

## Cong-I activist burns himself to death

NEW DELHI, May 24: A man grief-stricken by the assassination of former Premier Rajiv Gandhi burned himself to death in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said Thursday, reports AFP.

Subburayalu, 44, poured kerosene over himself and set himself ablaze outside Tamil Nadu's Palani town late Wednesday, the agency quoted police as saying.

Subburayalu was reportedly an activist of Gandhi's Congress (I) party.

## BRIEFLY

**Algerian opposition calls strike:** Algeria's biggest opposition party said it would call an indefinite general strike from Saturday. Reuter reports from Algiers.

**Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) President Abassi Madani** told a news conference on Thursday the stoppage would press the party's demands for a presidential election on June 27 at the same time as multi-party parliamentary elections.

President Chadli Benjedid was elected in 1989 for seven years.

Madani said the President had ignored an FIS demand that he step down and its call for the freezing of electoral law and an independent body to control the national assembly elections.

**12 killed in Soviet plane crash:** Twelve people were killed and 38 others injured, two seriously, when an Aeroflot plane crashed while trying to land at Leningrad Airport, Russian President Boris Yeltsin said, AFP from Moscow reports.

He said the Tu-154 plane was carrying 200 people on a flight from Sukhumi in Georgia.

Tass news agency said the plane crashed while trying to make an emergency landing after one of its engines failed. The nose of the craft slammed into the runway and the plane broke in two on impact, according to the agency.

Mr. Yeltsin told the Russian Parliament that a joint commission with representatives from both the Soviet and the republican governments would investigate the crash.

**108 Iraqis suffering from cholera:** The number of people suffering from cholera since the end of the Gulf war has risen to more than 100, with 17 new cases reported over the last week, an Iraqi health official said Wednesday, AFP reports from Baghdad.

The official, quoted by the Iraqi news agency, said the virus had been detected in Baghdad and 10 provinces, including the Kurdish regions of Dahuk and Arbil.

The number of sufferers has now reached 108, the official said, but there have so far been no deaths.

Cholera cases are multiplying and the risks of an epidemic have increased with the arrival of the summer heat, the Director of the UNICEF Programme here warned last Saturday.

Doctor Gianni Murzi said the number of confirmed cases may represent only 10 per cent of the real total.

The first outbreak of cholera was reported in Iraq after the Gulf war and during the anti-government revolts, with the health service badly hit by shortages and disorganisation.

**Amnesty for 74 in South Korea:** South Korea announced Thursday amnesty for political offenders, freeing 74 people from prison and reducing sentences or dropping charges for 1984 others, Reuter from Seoul says.

The Justice Ministry said charges of violating the national Security Law would be dropped against the country's main opposition leader Kim Dae-Jung.

He was charged in 1989 with failing to report a visit to North Korea by a member of his party. Kim has never been tried.

Absent from the list, however, was the country's most famous political prisoner, university student Im Su-Kyong, 22, who is serving a five-year sentence for an illegal 1989 trip to North Korea.

The Amnesty, a conciliatory gesture by President Roh Tae-Woo towards restive students and workers, had been widely predicted and followed weeks of often violent anti-government protests triggered by the fatal police beating of a student.

**Pakistan welcomes UN plan:** Pakistan welcomed United Nations plan for a political settlement in Afghanistan, underlining that Islamabad has always sought a peaceful solution to the 12-year-old conflict, AFP reports from Islamabad.

The Five-point proposal by Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar "is a step towards a political settlement," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

Pakistan, which shelters more than three million Afghan refugees, has been a conduit for American-supplied weapons to guerrillas fighting to topple the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul.

The spokesman said Pakistan has consistently worked for a political solution acceptable to the people of Afghanistan.

The plan includes a transitional period that would have an impartial interim body with the power to ensure free and fair elections, leading to the formation of a broad-based government.

**Moscow for better ties with E Europe:** Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh said here Friday that his country gives priority to the development of ties with East European countries, including Hungary, in its foreign policy, Xinhua from Moscow reports.

He made the remark following his talks with his Hungarian counterpart Jeszenski Geza, who arrived here on Wednesday for an official visit.

The Soviet Tass news agency quoted Bessmertnykh as saying the Soviet-Hungarian relations have entered a new phase which is characterized by complete independence, sovereignty and self-determination of national policies and principles.

The two sides are formulating a treaty to be used as a new legal base for bilateral relations, and the treaty should include clauses providing guarantee for military and political interests of both sides, the Soviet Foreign Minister said.

# Assassination an international plot: LTTE

## Send home all Lankan Tamils, Jayalalitha urges govt

NEW DELHI, May 24: A politician tipped to win elections in Indian's Tamil Nadu state where Rajiv Gandhi was killed asked the government Thursday to send home all Sri Lankan Tamils, reports AFP.

Implicitly blaming the assassination on Sri Lankan Tamils, Jayalalitha Jayaram told reporters, "I appeal, rather demand, that the centre should take immediate action to see that all Sri Lankan Tamils are sent back."

"This (repatriation) should take place immediately," the Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted Ms Jayalalitha as saying in the Tamil Nadu capital Madras before leaving for New Delhi for Gandhi's funeral Friday.

Ms Jayalalitha, an actress-turned-politician, heads the all-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), which is widely expected to storm to power in Tamil Nadu in elections now postponed until June.

She said the assassination of Gandhi, whose Congress (I) Party is in alliance with AIADMK, was a "horrendous tragedy" and that the "Sri Lankan Tamil militants had totally ruined the peaceful culture of Tamil Nadu."

Tamil Nadu, a sprawling coastal state, is home to an estimated 200,000 Sri Lankan Tamils who have fled their country and scores of Tamil rebels, including many from the powerful Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The LTTE has emerged as a

prime suspect in the Gandhi murder but the group has denied involvement.

"We looked forward to a period of stability and economic progress under Mr Gandhi..... now once again the country's future and destiny have become uncertain," Ms Jay-



Jayalalitha

alalitha said. The AIADMK leader's statement came a day after K Ramamurthy, President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Chapter, made a similar demand.

"Even a single person should not remain here, whoever it might be, because everybody comes in the guise of refugees," he said in Madras. "They have come seeking asylum and they cannot dictate, let them do all their nonsense in Eelam"

Eelam is the name given by Tamil militants to their pro-

posed homeland in Sri Lanka.

PTI from London adds: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said that the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was an "international plot to implicate the Tamils in general and the LTTE in particular

cran guerrillas fighting for an independent Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka are being investigated by police for the bomb slaying of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

In eight years of guerrilla warfare the liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has perfected methods of using land mines, trip-wire explosives and remote-controlled bombs, according to officials in New Delhi and Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital.

Police and the chief forensic expert investigating the bombing said Thursday that Gandhi's killer was almost certainly a Tamil from Sri Lanka who strapped explosives around her body in a denim belt.

An unidentified woman's body was the only one identified of the 16 people besides Gandhi who died as a result of the bombing in Sriperambudur, a town in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

The Tigers have denied responsibility for the killing, but police say they are the only militants known to operate in Tamil Nadu with that degree of explosives skill.

The Tigers are also known to have set up an suicide squad called the Black Tigers, which has a women's cell.

On Wednesday, police searched homes of alleged Tamil militants in Madras, Tamil Nadu's capital city, and a local press report said about 50 were detained in the sweep.

## Off the Record

### Cory sprains her left ankle

MANILA : Philippine President Corazon Aquino sprained an ankle on Thursday as she stepped out of a helicopter in a ricefield outside Manila for a meeting with farmers, reports Reuter.

Aquino, 58, lost her balance but Presidential Guards caught her by the arm preventing her from falling, witnesses said.

She hobbled onto a makeshift stage to speak to a crowd of about 4,000 farmers in Cabiao town 65 km (40 miles) north of Manila. She later distributed land titles.

A medical bulletin said Aquino had sprained her left ankle and that X-rays did not show any fracture.

Aquino cancelled a meeting in Manila later on Thursday with Takuro Endo, president of Nissan Diesel Motor Company Ltd of Japan, her spokesman said.



### Bush 'downgrades' Soviet Union

WASHINGTON : President Bush Friday called the Soviet Union a 'great power', apparently downgrading it from 'superpower' status. Robert Gates, the next CIA chief, said in a major speech to newspaper editors recently that there is now only one superpower in the world, and that is the United States. Bush, who was speaking at a press conference, also indirectly rejected President Gorbachev's plea to the West for aid upto 100 billion dollars (presumably over the next five years). Bush said, "President Gorbachev knows that we have understandable questions about [the Soviet Union's] creditworthiness". He never believed, said Bush that Gorbachev had given up on reform. "I'll tell you there is something that is positive there, and that is that Yeltsin and Gorbachev appear to be in communication," reports PTI.

### Gayoom 'man of the sea'

COLOMBO : Maldivian President Maumoom Abdul Gayoom has been presented with 'Man of The Sea' award by the Italian naval league in recognition of his services towards protecting and preserving the marine environment. The award-presentation ceremony was held on May 21 in Palermo, Italy, according to reports reaching here today from Male, the capital of the Maldives. President Gayoom told the ceremony that enormous work had been undertaken by the Italian Naval League to protect the seas and the marine life.

Gayoom also focussed on some of the important works undertaken by the Maldivian government to protect low lying islands of the Maldives from the possible dangers of the sea level rise. Among the steps undertaken are the control of the damage done to the reefs, prevention of indiscriminate throwing of rubbish into sea and minimisation of the damage caused by tourists taking corals from the reefs as souvenirs, report Xinhua.

### 'Worst brat in Britain' wins damages

LONDON : A six-year-old boy on Thursday 'won substantial' damages from the mass-circulation newspaper The Sun, which had described him as "the worst brat in Britain" and invented quotes from his mother. The tabloid, with a circulation of some four million, in July 1989 alleged that Jonathan Hunt was "Britain's naughtiest kid" for killing his cat, wrecking his home and slicing his own ear. The newspaper failed, however, to say that the child had become mentally handicapped after suffering from meningitis at birth. A court awarded Jonathan "substantial", but undisclosed damages, after his lawyer argued that the aging boy was "not willfully naughty and is not therefore as portrayed in the article". His mother also sued Rupert Murdoch's newspaper for libel because it had invented quotes from her, notably describing the boy as a "terror". The Sun has apologised to the Hunt family, reports AFP.