

The LTTE mole in Kehelwatte

By a special correspondent

Preliminary Police investigations into the assassinations of Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali and President Premadasa point to a terrorist organisation, very likely the LTTE being responsible for the slayings. In fact, Director of the Colombo Crime Detective Bureau, Senior Superintendent of Police Lionel Gunasinghe responding to questions at his week's Cabinet News Briefing said the LTTE was the prime suspect in the President's brutal murder and the modus operandi used was typical of that terrorist organisation.

About two weeks before the assassinations there were intelligence reports that an LTTE hit squad had entered Colombo. This was followed by both police and military intelligence that two white Toyota Carina cars carrying loads of explosives had entered the city. One of the targets was reported to be Army headquarters. A maximum security alert followed.

However, detectives say they are investigating both assassinations with open minds. President Premadasa left his private residence, Sucharitha, at Kehelwatte for the last time around 11.30 a.m. on the morning of Monday, May 1.

He arrived at the Sugathadasa Stadium and after inspecting the formation of the procession route, I understand he was on his way to President's House to go through an

aide memoir with his officials before proceeding to lead the UNP May Day Rally on Galle Face Green.

However, fate had it, that as the President's Range Rover arrived at the Armour Street Junction, he saw a feeder procession moving in

from adjoining Messenger Street. Acting against the advice of his security officers, President Premadasa got down from his car and proceeded to give directions and signal the feeder procession, asking it to merge with the main procession which was being led by some of his Senior Ministers.

With the President was his Press Secretary Evans Cooray who had a narrow escape. The President who was well known for being meticulous, also gave instructions to some of the banner carrying processionists. Since, he felt he was holding up the main procession, Mr. Premadasa had asked his Senior Ministers to proceed, while he continued to direct the feeder procession.

Standing beside the President, were his Press Secretary Evans Cooray, Senior Superintendent of Police Ronnie Gunasinghe and the President's Security Guards. It was now close to 12.45 in the early afternoon. The President was wearing a green cap,

bush shirt and white sarong, he was also wearing a wrist watch. There was a shrill ring. It was Mr. Cooray's Celltel. His daughter was inquiring whether he was coming home later to take her to the Pageant at Galle Face. Due to the din caused by

the shouting processionists, he moved about 15 feet away to speak to his daughter. Then suddenly, the suicide bomber emerged on a bicycle from the feeder procession and was riding straight at the President when the Police Special Task Force Commandos providing security for the President stopped him. But, it was too late. The killer had set off the plastic explosives strapped to his body believed to be RDF explosives which the LTTE is known to have had access to and was also allegedly used in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination.

This kind of explosive is the most sophisticated and cannot be detected even by the detectors at airports. RDF explosives were also used for the Pan American Airways disaster over Lockerbie, Scotland where nearly 300 people were killed.

Six STF Commandos were blown up along with the suicide bomber, a seventh, a leading marksman died in hospital. As the smoke and dust cleared, people

started looking in the carnage for President Premadasa. He was not to be seen. Many, including the Police Officers present thought that Mr. Premadasa had been whisked away to safety in one of the back up security trucks. The bodies that were lying strewn on the ground were picked up and taken to the Police Morgue at the General Hospital. One of them was later identified as that of President Premadasa. It was in a mutilated state, but could be identified as that of Mr. Premadasa. There was also his wrist watch still strapped to his hand.

Superintendent of Police Ronnie Gunasinghe, he was still alive had been rushed to the General Hospital for emergency surgery. On the way to the hospital, Mr. Gunasinghe suddenly sat up in the vehicle taking him to hospital and said in Sinhalese "Hurry up, I must come back". But, that was not to be.

At the Accident Service, doctors finding his heart failing began massaging it. But, the Police Officer's body was perforated with shrapnel and he was reported to have begun bleeding from all over. Mr. Gunasinghe also had two deep cuts on his face. Posthumously, he was promoted to the rank of Deputy Inspector General of Police.

Detectives from the Crime Detective Bureau led by its Director Lionel Gunatileke who had to cut short a one month scholarship in Japan to

head the CDB team of investigators into two assassinations, assisted by the CID and the four detectives from Scotland Yard who were first got down to help in the investigations into the assassination of Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali.

Detectives discovered the head of the suspected killer whose

body was missing as a result of the explosives being strapped to it and, but his face was unscathed and easily identifiable. The next day, Ruppavahini and newspapers carried the photograph of the head and face of the suspected killer. Bits of a cyanide phial were found embedded in his neck.

The breakthrough came when police were

free spender and had even given the lodging house keeper a large sum of money to set up the grocery store. During this period, he had become quite friendly with the President's valet Mohideen and according to some reports there were even photographs of the two. The suicide bombing

neck, all point to the LTTE being responsible for the crime.

According to some reports, the valet Mohideen who was standing close to the President and who was killed in the explosion, had been astounded to see the suspect riding up to them on a bicycle and had shouted "Babu,

what are you doing here?"

According to this report, Mohideen had also tried to stop Babu whom he had thought up to then, to be a friend. But, like the STF men who stopped the cycle, he too, was killed in the blast.

In all, 24 persons were killed. They included the President, his two valets, seven security officers, SSP Ronnie

Gunasinghe, while the rest were civilians.

There were also reports that a Vegetarian hotel opposite to where Babu was lodging, had been sealed and the owner taken in for questioning by detectives.

Detectives were also reported to have traced a safehouse run by the suspect Babu, at Wellawatte. To all accounts, Babu who had unlimited funds, is thought to have been a senior LTTE cadre who had been kept in a place at Kehelwatte for two and a half years, to be activated when the need arose. And that did happen last Monday.

In the middle of this week the Manager of a leading hotel in the Fort was reported to have informed the authorities of a suspicious looking guest. According to these reports the suspect, described as being a close relative of LTTE leader Prabhakaran had been taken in for questioning.

The investigations made up to this stage, point to the LTTE having assassinated President Ranasinghe Premadasa. But we will have to wait until investigations are over to get confirmation of this.

Athulathmudali
Mr. Athulathmudali was addressing a DUNF rally at the Kirullapone Stadium about eight o'clock on the night of April 23 this year, when a gunman pulled out a pistol from his shirtfront and fired point blank range, wounding him

fatally. According to eye witnesses three shots were fired at the stage directed at the DUNF leader, of them had been fired with telling accuracy and hit Mr. Athulathmudali in the chest.

Mr. Athulathmudali's bodyguard had reportedly fired at the gunman, and wounded him in the region of the chest according to one witness and in the back according to another. The gunman wounded the bodyguard in the leg in the exchange of fire.

A man who tried to give chase to the wounded gunman, was fired at, as the assassin escaped.

The next day, around noon the body of a man believed to be the killer was found lying in a cul de sac, with a pistol and a National Identity Card in his possession. It carried the name Appiah Balakrishnan and a photograph identical to that of the man whose body was found near the Cooperative store down a lane close to the Kirullapone Stadium.

A post mortem showed the man had died of cyanide poisoning. This gave credence to the theory that the gunman was an LTTE Hit Squad terrorist.

However, it was soon discovered that the name on the Identity Card was false.

The body was not that of Appiah Balakrishnan of Kokuveli, Manipay, Jaffna. This gave room to much speculation.

According to police they are near to identifying Mr. Athulathmudali's assassin.

