

Sophistication and Suicides Main Hurdles in Probing LTTE

MADRAS - The Sri Lankan Tamil militant outfit, LTTE's mastery over sophisticated wireless communications equipment, fine tuned with secret and complicated codes and ciphers had created serious hurdles for the special investigation team (SIT) probing the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi near Madras in 1991.

It was also hampered by a series of suicides by LTTE's middle-level leaders and cadres who bit cyanide capsules to keep alive organizational and operational secrets they were privy to.

The LTTE's communication system was intended to avoid detection by security agencies that monitor air waves. It had also taken the double precaution of clothing the messages in complicated codes and of transmitting messages and

receiving replies in parts by frequently changing the frequencies in a pre-arranged manner. This made detection difficult, and made deciphering a "long, brain-teasing exercise".

Often the results would be incomplete, and the disjointed messages never told the whole story, it said, adding, the SIT was able to silence the wireless sets in India only after raiding LTTE hideouts and seizing codesheets and wireless equipment.

Once the LTTE's back was broken in India, the killers and conspirators had to choose between arrest and death by cyanide, and quite a few -- 25 to be exact, including the key accused Sivarasam and Subha -- chose the easy way out by committing suicide in the true LTTE fashion.

The prosecution further said the antidote for cyanide was not found to be effective, as it was meant only for accidental cyanide poisoning and required intravenous administration, that too, within moments of the cyanide intake.

"For the investigator, every cyanide death is like hitting a dead end. SIT's success has been that it was able to steer course through a by-lane or a by-pass everytime it encountered a cyanide death and hit a blind alley," it said. It was to the investigators' credit that the full mystery could still be unraveled.

The investigation also exposed the vulnerability of south Indian states and brought into focus LTTE's design of creating a "larger Tamil Eelam", comprising the north and east of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, the prosecution said.

The design was to be executed through a group of Indian youths indoctrinated, trained, armed and financed by the LTTE under the name "Tamil National Retrieval Force".

(PTI)