

Common factors: Beant Singh bomb blast and the LTTE. (1995, September 10). *The Sunday times*.

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By Our Military Analyst

The August 3, assassination of Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh in Chandigarh by a Sikh suicide bomber has directed the Indian security and intelligence authorities to examine the Sikh militant - LTTE connection.

Indian officials believe that either the LTTE would have provided the technology or the Sikh militants may have copied it from the LTTE prototype. The art of suicide killing is the hall mark of the LTTE.

The assassins head, a young man of about 20, was found with his two arms and legs, typical of the remains of the LTTE suicide bombers. The bombers who killed Rajiv Gandhi, Ranasinghe Premadasa and Gamini Dissanayake were no different.

Indian security and intelligence authorities have long suspected the link between various Indian separatist groups and the LTTE. Among the groups the LTTE developed close ties are some 22 South Indian Tamil political and militant groups and at least three North Indian groups - the Assamese ULFA, the

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Kashmiri Mujahideen and the Punjabi Sikhs. While the contact with the South Indian Tamil groups was mostly developed by Baby Subramaniam who now heads the education wing of the LTTE, the northern and the eastern Indian connections were mostly developed by the LTTE's KP department headed by K. Pathmanathan who is the LTTE's chief procurement officer and head of the LTTE's shipping network.

The LTTE contact with the ULFA, the Kashmiris and the Sikhs has been developed both in the West - Europe and North America - and in South Asia and Myanmar, where the LTTE has secured a base.

Of the ULFA, Sikh and Kashmiri groups, the LTTE connections with the ULFA and the Kashmiri groups have been well

documented. Their areas of co-operation range from transfer of technology (mostly land mine) to international gun running. LTTE is the only guerrilla organisation in the subcontinent that owns ships. Of the Sri Lankan Tamil insurgent groups, the LTTE is the only group that maintained independent contact with other militant and political groups within India, while receiving substantial military assistance from the Indian Government.

This was between October 1983 and May 1987 through India's external intelligent agency - the Research and Analysis Wing. Other than the LTTE, there is one other group that is well known for independently developing the suicide bomb kit - that is the Hamas. Operating out of its main sup-

port base in West Bank and Gaza, Hamas has during the past year staged at least 10 suicide killings inside Israel.

West Asian groups such as Hamas, Hizbullah and Jihad, are against the peace process spearheaded by the PLO and Israel.

Although LTTE's links with West Asian groups existed from 1977 onwards, firstly through the EROS and then later independently, primarily to procure weapons and explosives, there has been no other form of cooperation. After President Premadasa's killing many Western security agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency, stepped up surveillance on the LTTE to ascertain whether it was transferring the art of suicide killing to any of its West Asian counterparts in return for finance, weapons or for ideological reasons.

According to the strict Islamic code, suicide is not permitted even in the conduct of the holy war. Therefore there is a high degree of hesitation among Muslim militants to use suicide killing.

Suicide killing by way of a vehicle bomb was first used in Beirut in 1984 to strike the US and French marine headquarters killing some 300 service personnel.

There is very little to prevent a suicide strike. Only sound and accurate intelligence could prevent a suicide strike.

In the Indian Punjab, where some 20,000 Sikhs have died fighting for an independent Sikh state called Khalistan, this is the first time a suicide bomber had struck. Chief Minister Beant Singh, who was killed, was elected in 1992, when New Delhi ended six years of direct rule.

When the bomb went off Mr. Singh was getting into his car - twelve others too died instantly. Three died later in hospital. Police initially suspected that the bomb was in his car and it may have been detonated by remote control.

The same organisation entrusted to investigate the Rajiv Gandhi murder - the Central Investigations Bureau - has already questioned more than 400 people. Some 25 security personnel entrusted to protect the Chief Minister too have been suspended.

Security for other VIPs particularly the Punjabi Sikh Police Chief K.P.S. Gill who is credited to have crushed the Khalistan movement has been strengthened. Mr. Gill has pledged to go after the leaders of the group responsible for the killing of the Chief Minister.

Babbar Khalsa claimed responsibility for the killing. A statement said that the Chief Minister Beant Singh had betrayed the Sikh community and therefore he had to be sentenced to death. However, Mr. Gill claimed that the killing could have been the work of another organisation.

Babbar Khalsa, an internationally well connected militant group like the LTTE, is one of the three insurgent groups that survived the Indian military campaign in Punjab that lasted from 1982 to 1992.

Today, the Sikh community assesses Beant Singh as a moderate politician in the Congress Party but a man who gave wide powers to the police to crush the Sikh militancy.

What are the implications of the suicide bomb being widely used or its transfer within and beyond the subcontinent?

Governments will have to think about security more collectively. After the end of the Cold War the boundaries have become more porous. No one country can ensure the security of that nation without the cooperation of at least the nearby nations. With the rapid transfer of technology and the movements of ideas and people, the only way to prevent the transfer of lethal technology and undesirable elements is to step up close cooperation between security agencies of the region.



Scene of the blast: Punjab's chief Minister falls victim to 'suicide' terrorism