

LTTE aims to get president within its sights. (1999, October 24). *The Island.*

LTTE aims to get President within its sights

by Our Defence Correspondent

Within hours of President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga's televised speech on Wednesday, the LTTE began planning to assassinate the President during the upcoming election campaign, when she will be speaking at a large number of public rallies, according to Tamil political sources.

A Tamil political party, which was formerly a group fighting for a separate state, received information from the north on Friday that an elite unit of Black Tiger suicide cadres is being formed quickly to carry out the plot.

This unit, which includes men and women who have been trained to speak Sinhala fluently, is likely to try and get across army lines to Colombo soon, sources said.

The LTTE have proved to be especially efficient at assassinating top politicians at public rallies. One of the first was Rajiv Gandhi at Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu in 1991, where a female Black Tiger, Dhanu, blew up herself and the former Indian Prime Minister, as she reached out to garland him.

On May Day in 1993, another Black Tiger, Babu, who had spent years befriending members of the presidential security division, walked up to President Ranasinghe Premadasa at Armour Street Junction in Colombo and blew himself up.

In October of 1994, another female suicide bomber blew up Gamini Disسانayake, the United National Party's presidential candidate, at a midnight election rally at Thotalanga in Colombo.

Investigations of all these assassinations have shown that the plot is planned and carried out by several cadres, although the actual blast is done by one Black Tiger. Video tapes and photographs of previous election rallies later clearly showed the woman who killed Gamini Disسانayake, watching him and awaiting her chance to

get close to where he stood.

Since most election rallies are held outside Colombo, it is quite likely that any assassination attempt on President Kumaratunga's life could take place anywhere.

A series of small bombings in Colombo in recent weeks, which killed no one, and wounded only a few, showed that the LTTE still has at least a few cadres in Colombo, who would be able to assist the suicide cadres. Such small bombings have also occurred in other parts of the country notably the tea plantation areas in the districts of Badulla and Nuwara Eliya.

The president's calling of a snap election has actually placed the LTTE in a bad strategic position.

If she wins, and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and the other constituents of the People's Alliance already having pledged their support to President Kumaratunga,



President Chandrika Kumaratunga

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Rajiv Gandhi

she will definitely continue with the same strategy on the ethnic question.

That is, she will continue to refuse to cease military action, since she learned a bitter lesson in April 1995 that the LTTE

will always use a cease-fire to their advantage and attack whenever they choose, putting the armed forces in a perilous position.

Although the army's advance in the

north has been more of a crawl, a win by the president would put the LTTE in the position of having to face another six years of Chandrika Kumaratunga and the People's Alliance. Such a long time would surely be enough for the army to wipe out the LTTE.

On the other hand, there is no doubt that Wickremasinghe would win if she were not the contestant, since there is no clear leadership in the People's Alliance at the second tier. Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike is not physically fit to go on an election campaign. Anuruddha Ratwatte has lost popularity due to his inability to finish off the Tigers; and none of the other ministers have enough popular appeal.

At the same time, the opposition leader is far more likely to open peace talks than President Kumaratunga, which would suit the LTTE fine.

It is most likely that the election will be

November.

The Constitution calls for a 3-week nomination period, followed by at least four weeks of election campaigning. This would definitely put the poll date in mid-January. The latest would be the end of January.

However, the possibility of having the president from one party, and parliament being ruled by another party, has thrown up an alarming situation where the war is concerned, which is definitely to the advantage of the LTTE.

Even if the president wins the election, she still needs to win the next General election, which is scheduled to be held by next August.

If not, there would be critical consequences for the war. As president, she will remain Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, and will form a Cabinet. But if another party controls parliament, it could crush the next budget vote, which will be for the year 2001/2002.

No money for the government would also mean no money for the war. Purchasing of all war material would come to a halt, as would even the salaries of soldiers.

In any case, should such a hypothetical situation occur, the result would be an ungovernable country, and would surely lead to more elections.

Right now, the most likely results are that President Kumaratunga will be re-elected, and there will be a hung parliament, which is the same as having another party controlling the house, since any vote needs at least a simple majority.

The only other alternative, which the president is banking on, is that a win by her in the presidential poll, will convince voters to cast their ballots for the PA, simply to avoid chaos.

The next three months will be crucial for the country, and the LTTE will do its utmost to turn the situation to its advantage. Such an opportunity has not presented itself to them since the last elections in 1994.



Gamini Disسانayake

held in mid-January.

She is likely to announce the date for the election, which has already been set by an astrologer, once the Vote on Account in place of the budget is concluded in early