

Mossad connection cited in new lead to Rajiv Gandhi assassination

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan Maitra

Investigation of the 1991 Rajiv Gandhi assassination took a surprise turn in mid-September when a former minister in the 1985 Rajiv Gandhi cabinet, Arif Mohammad Khan, told newsmen that Scotland Yard has information that Chandraswamy, a jet-setter tantric who is connected to British intelligence, among other agencies, had offered the Israeli intelligence service, the Mossad, \$1 million to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi. Khan, however, has not substantiated his claims yet.

A few days after Arif Mohammad Khan revealed this explosive information to the press, news came out that Chandraswamy had been hobnobbing with Dawood Ibrahim, the Bombay mafia low-life who is based in Dubai and considered the main accomplice in the series of bombings that rocked Bombay in 1993. Reports claimed that Chandraswamy had accompanied the mafia don on a trip from Dubai to New York, and Ibrahim himself had received the suspicious "godman," i.e., who claims to be a man of God, at the Dubai airport.

Following the release of this news, then-Minister of State for Internal Security Rajesh Pilot asked the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to arrest the phony godman. The sleuths, arguing that Pilot had exceeded his authority, did not arrest the godman, but have since interrogated him. Chandraswamy has also been asked not to leave the country. Meanwhile, the cabinet reshuffle which took place a day after Pilot had called for the godman's arrest, saw Pilot removed from his ministry and sent to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry with an independent charge. Subsequently, the M.C. Jain Commission investigating the Rajiv Gandhi assassination called Chandraswamy to be deposed on Sept. 24. Chandraswamy failed to show up on the given date, citing ill health. The new date for his deposition has been set for Oct. 7.

The "Get Chandraswamy" campaign began when Babloo Srivastava, a small-time gangster who had once been in the ruling Congress Party, was extradited by the Singapore government and interrogated by the CBI. Srivastava told the CBI that he was provided protection by Chandraswamy, who had given him shelter when the Uttar Pradesh police were looking for him earlier. He also told the CBI of the Chandraswamy-Dawood Ibrahim nexus. Earlier, Arif Mohammad Khan, who was raided by tax officials in late August for amassing wealth through fraudulent means, had told newsmen that the raid was instigated by Chandraswamy. Khan also told how he came to know of the godman's

links to the Rajiv Gandhi assassination. Chandraswamy has denied all the accusations so far, although he did not deny his acquaintance with Babloo Srivastava.

At this point, Chandraswamy is under the gun. Indians have been complaining of the growing nexus between high-level politicians and criminals. Chandraswamy, the extent of whose reach within the Indian political scene is anyone's guess, had long been cited as a "criminal" who controls the top-level politicians and thus escapes the reach of the Law. Chandraswamy's high-flying lifestyle, and occasional exposés of his connections in Britain and elsewhere, has convinced everyone that the godman has the ability to pull any number of strings to stay out of jail and spin money.

This time, however, it seems that Chandraswamy is in real trouble, for a number of reasons. With the Indian general elections around the corner, the tendency of all politicians is to avoid taking his side at this juncture. For the Congress Party, in particular, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi is more than an ordinary crime, and simply the naming of Chandraswamy as an accomplice in the assassination has created a hostile environment for all those within the party who have developed links with the godman over the years. Under such conditions, it is unlikely that any politician, however important he or she may be, can openly defend the godman or pull strings to protect him from further interrogations. Equally important is the fact that Sonia Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi's widow and a force to be reckoned with within the Congress Party, is reportedly active in trying to find out details of Chandraswamy's connection, if any, to her husband's assassination.

Mafia links

Chandraswamy's alleged connection to Dawood Ibrahim has also given the Indian opposition ample fodder to attack the weak Narasimha Rao government and the weaker Congress Party. Following the bombings that shook Bombay, both the CBI and Indian Home Minister S.B. Chavan had named Ibrahim as the main accomplice and the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) as the brain. Srivastava's revelation now raises fresh questions: Who is Chandraswamy? Who is Dawood Ibrahim? And why do they remain free and powerful?

It is unlikely that the answers to all these questions will ever be found. Chandraswamy's exploits have been public knowl-



The late Rajiv Gandhi, while prime minister, addresses a May Day rally at Dhanbad in Bihar in 1985.

edge for a long time, and only some naive Indians may believe that Chandraswamy has omnipotent tantric powers to stay in the clear. Daily visits by powerful politicians to his “ashram” on the outskirts of New Delhi, and frequent jaunts around the world, leave little doubt about the nexus between Chandraswamy and the top Indian politicians and bureaucrats.

Who is Chandraswamy?

What is amazing about Chandraswamy, though, is that the more one knows about him, the more remains to be known. A book by the late Steve Martindale, *By Hook or By Crook* (1989), throws some light on this wheeler-dealer.

Martindale, a Washington lawyer who used to travel with Chandraswamy, said that two of Chandraswamy’s money managers, Miller and Fraser, two Canadians, were involved in the George Bush-Oliver North-sponsored Iran-Contra guns-for-drugs affair in 1989. This was not revealed by Martindale, but by the late Bill Casey, then head of the CIA, in testimony before a U.S. Senate subcommittee.

Martindale has a lot to reveal. Chandraswamy’s connections to Tiny Rowland (former owner of Lonrho and a British intelligence asset), the Sultan of Brunei, and Enrique Zobel, scion of a very powerful family in the Philippines, have been well documented. Martindale also gives details showing Chandraswamy’s clout in the Indian scene and his closeness to Colonel Mobutu of Zaire, whose handling of his nation’s finances has raised a few eyebrows over the years.

What emerges from Martindale’s book, is not only who the godman is linked to, or how much money he handles, or how close his links are to such nefarious characters as the gun-dealer Adnan Khashoggi, but that Chandraswamy can call up the most powerful people from his hotel room while

traveling. What Martindale obviously does not reveal, is why such powerful people depend on Chandraswamy, and what the godman delivers. It is the last part of the query which intrigues people the most.

It is nonetheless obvious that Chandraswamy moves in an area where the high and mighty function in the shadows. His connection to Libyan officer Ahmed Qaddafi, exposed during the Pamela Bordes scandal, and Donald Trelford of the London *Observer*, owned by Rupert Murdoch, indicates that the Indian godman is an asset of very many downright obnoxious and dangerous people.

What got compromised?

What the Indian people would like to know, however, is how these unsavory characters connected with Chandraswamy have succeeded in compromising Indian politics, economy, and security. If Dawood Ibrahim is not truly an ISI agent but an asset of these people, then why don’t the CBI and the Home Ministry, both of which know better, say so? What is the validity of the statement made by Arif Mohammad Khan concerning Chandraswamy’s involvement in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination? There is little doubt at this point that Rajiv Gandhi was not killed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam supremo V. Prabhakaran, but that there were others involved.

It is likely that none of these crucial issues will be resolved, because too much is at stake. Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984, Pakistan President Zia ul-Haq’s assassination in 1988, Bangladesh Presidents Mujibur Rehman and Ziaur Rahman’s assassinations, in 1975 and 1981, respectively, and a number of assassinations of top Sri Lankan leaders in recent years, have been accepted as “normal events” and left at that. It is likely that Rajiv Gandhi’s assassination will also be accepted as a “normal event.”

But the suspicion that things have been covered up will not be washed away by forcibly arriving at such conclusions. Chandraswamy has already gotten support from a fellow suspect, Dr. Subramaniam Swamy, another high-flying jet-setter whose connection to the Mossad is also talked about openly. Subramaniam Swamy, a former Harvard professor and minister in the Chandrashekhar cabinet for about a year, has also been named as a person who is in the know of the conspiracy that killed Rajiv Gandhi. The accusation came from Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan. Swamy, in a recent pow-wow with newsmen, came to the phony godman’s rescue, challenging all those who are “out to get Prime Minister Narasimha Rao by aiming their guns at Chandraswamy.”

On the other hand, there is a distinct possibility that those who want to expose Chandraswamy are keen to expose that part of his connections that would suit them politically. In other words, there is no indication that there is real interest yet to find out the full extent of Chandraswamy’s operations and how dangerous they are. How does Chandraswamy help George Bush, or Tiny Rowland, or Rupert Murdoch? These are, perhaps, the questions to ask.