

INDIA VS SOUTH AFRICA: CRICKET AND HISTORY

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FOCUS

Raiding for Radu

The security agencies draw a blank in their search for the kidnapped Romanian diplomat

More than 45 days later, there's no trace of the kidnapped Romanian diplomat, Lilviu Radu. Is he alive and well? Is he in Punjab or Pakistan? These are questions bedevilling sleuths of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Delhi, the Punjab Police and the Border Security Force (BSF).

Each day, at the special cell set up in the IB headquarters, one more piece of information comes up that fits into the million-piece Radu jigsaw. But Ajit Kumar Doval—a joint director in the IB and head of the operations to free the Romanian—can't wait till he has the whole picture.

It's a matter of life and death, after all. Some things are clear, of course.

- The chubby, bespectacled Romanian charge d'affaires is alive. At any rate, the IB is certain about this.

- He's in a house in Jalandhar. Attempts have been made to slip him across the border to Pakistan. A last try was made on 6 November. But the BSF foiled this.

- Nine persons masterminded the abduction. The IB has their names. They are: Manjinder Singh, Pritam Singh Sekhon, Daya Singh, Jaspal Singh, Dev Pal Singh, Hari Singh Khalsa, one Sharma and Kuldeep Singh Sandhu. Dev Pal Singh was killed in a dramatic, mid-day shootout in Connaught Place. Khalsa and Sharma were picked up in Faridabad and Jahangirpuri in West Delhi on the basis of tip-offs provided by the Punjab Police. They are being grilled in the IB's interrogation centre at Red Fort.

- Sixteen crack commandos of the National Security Guards (NSG) have been kept ready to swoop down on the remaining kidnappers' hideouts. Two raids have already been conducted on suspected places. But the security agencies haven't met with success.

Radu isn't free.

This isn't surprising. The 9-October kidnap was executed with great precision from the start. Officials disclose



Radu in captivity: a picture of confidence

that the kidnappers, most probably of the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), took five houses on rent. They knew their geography well. For, two residences were located in Sadiq Nagar, and

one each in Vikaspuri, Pitampura and Vasant Vihar. This is a nice spread of territory that makes police surveillance difficult.

This was the first handicap for the

The abduction drama ■ What happened when

9 October: Radu is kidnapped from his Jor Bagh residence in Delhi.

11 October: Four Sikh militant groups—Khalistan Liberation Front (KLF), KLF (Panjwar faction), the Bhindranwale Tiger Force and the Sikh Students Federation—claim responsibility.

12 October: Two youths walk into UNI office and deliver a brown envelope containing pictures of Radu with the

militants. The KLF warns that the diplomat will be killed if Sikh extremists facing death sentences for assassinating Gen. Vaidya are not released.

13 October: Catherina Radu, the diplomat's wife, accuses the Government of India of showing a "lack of response".

14 October: Police officials oppose the release of the militants, saying that such a move will boost the morale of the extremists.

Delhi Police when they were called in to the scene of the kidnap. They got intimation of it on the home ministry wires and that too a full three hours after the incident. Delhi's police commissioner Arun Bhagat is acknowledgedly livid about this. As he told SUNDAY in an interview: "First, we got late to the spot. And, second, my force can't provide personal protection to every Indian or foreign VIP."

Anyway, that late response helped the kidnappers in the getaway. Investigators say Radu was swiftly moved from house to house and was probably spirited off to Punjab a week after the incident, on 16 October. It was the same day the Delhi Police killed Dev Pal Singh. Thereafter, the trail gets cold. And confusing.

IB officers say the KCF men took Radu to Chandigarh. Two houses were raided there but the NSG drew a blank. Then, on 30 October, NSG personnel stormed three houses in Sadiq Nagar. Does this mean Radu was brought back to Delhi? Or was the raiding party acting on a tip-off to apprehend the conspirators, and not necessarily rescue Radu? The IB is tight-lipped.

And with reason. A top intelligence official alleged that information was leaking to the kidnappers—through the Delhi Police. True or not, it reveals the huge distrust one agency has for the other in the Radu case. And it has been on show in each of the six meetings of the high-level committee headed by the Cabinet secretary, Naresh Chandra. Samples:

- Officials from the foreign office's pro-

mat told the Naresh Chandra committee. "We've lost face internationally."

- The Delhi Police has also lambasted the IB for its failure to provide intelligence.
- There's no love lost between the IB and RAW either. Insiders say Arun Bhagat is rooting against the IB at the instigation of RAW. Bhagat was a former RAW official.

Such bureaucratic infighting is inevitable in an operation the size of the Radu one. Three hundred and fifty field agents have been detailed, 24 hours a day to grab leads. Between Rs 7 and 8 lakhs have been spent. And Doval, the joint director in the IB and a local "kidnapping expert", is apparently sifting mountains of data and information to pull that elusive Radu out. "He hasn't slept since 9 October," confessed a top IB official. "And he's the best we have."

At the same time, Doval has no mean opponents. Right through the Radu saga, the KCF men have been one step ahead of the intelligence organisations. And they have specially marshalled tech-

niques against detection. Take the matter of the photographs of Radu in captivity simultaneously released by UNI and PTI.

The first impression was that they had been taken at the house of a Kashmiri somewhere in West Delhi. Then other theories were floated; some plausible, others bizarre. Now the truth is out.



The white Maruti car that was used in the kidnapping being examined by forensic experts: taking sharp look

The photographs were taken in a moving truck. Radu was made to sit with his abductors at the back of it. A roughly-hewn shawl or blanket made the background. But most clever of all, the snaps were taken with a polaroid camera. And polaroid prints don't easily lend themselves to enlargements. So detectives had no way of getting more from the photographs.

All this would have remained a mystery if Sharma and Khalsa hadn't been interrogated. They have spoken much, in the words of a senior IB officer. Even minute details have been revealed. "But Radu's location is not known to them," said an interrogator. "He's being apparently moved from place to place twice in a day." The IB depends much on what Sharma and Khalsa will spill. But going by the past capacity of Radu's captors to surprise, nothing can be taken for granted. It's a battle of wits. And Ajit Kumar Doval and his bosses are wearily settling down for a long one. •

N.V. Sekhar/ New Delhi.

16 October: KLF sets 19 October as the deadline for the release of the militants.

17 October: Akali Dal(M) chief Simranjeet Singh Mann demands the release of the terrorists.

19 October: Romania requests Pakistan to use its influence over the militants to secure Radu's release.

16 November: No breakthrough in sight yet.