

TERRORIST ATTACK IN BANGALORE A PROFILE

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On 28 December 2005, terrorists, later found to belong to the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) carried out an attack inside the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) campus in Bangalore, Karnataka, killing one scientist and injuring five others.¹ The terrorists threw grenades and fired with automatic rifles at the delegates of an international conference of the Operational Research Society of India.

Bangalore has emerged as an important city in the strategy of certain terrorist organizations, especially the Lashkar-e-Taiba. Recent police investigations revealed a LeT-backed conspiracy to engage in violent activities including attacks against vital installations, places of economic and national importance with an objective to disrupt communal harmony in the country.² Ajai Kumar Singh, Bangalore Police Commissioner, in an interview, informed that the LeT had planned to carry out explosions at the Kaiga nuclear power plant in Uttara Kannada district, the Alamatti Reservoir in Bagalkot district and the Sharavathi power transmission lines. According to sources, the central intelligence agencies have warned of imminent terrorist strikes against Information Technology

centres like Bangalore and sensitive economic installations in South India.

Links to Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)³

None of the terrorist organizations have claimed responsibility as of January 2006. Initial recovery of sophisticated weapons suggests that the terrorists are linked to Kashmir or Pakistan based terrorist organizations. The recovery included an AK-56 assault rifle, three grenades, empty cartridges and magazines of an AK-47 rifle. The initial suspicions on the LeT connection was confirmed when police arrested Razi-Ur-Rehman alias Abdul Rehman, the chief of the LeT's 'operations in South India' in Nalgonda, Andhra Pradesh on 1 January 2006.⁴ Police sources claimed that Rehman had been in Saudi Arabia for the past 13 years and served as fund raiser for the LeT. He later became a lieutenant to LeT's Abu Hamsa⁵, alias Abdul Bari and later succeeded Asghar Ali, a top LeT militant in charge of

¹ The deceased was identified as MC Puri, a scientist at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), New Delhi.

² See "Police: Lashkar targeted vital installations," *The Hindu*, 17 January 2006.

³ Along with LeT, other terrorist organizations, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) are also involved in establishing sleeper cells across the country. In recent times, LeT became more active in spreading terror in India outside J&K.

⁴ "Rehman is Key Operator," *The Asian Age*, 4 January 2006.

⁵ Abu Hamsa is reportedly involved in Hyderabad bomb blast case and he helped to found a south Indian extremist group, the Muslim Defence Force (MDF) in 2002.

South Indian operations. Police interrogations have ascertained that Rehman was trained in Bangladesh and Pakistani militant camps and has been deputed to recruit cadres in south India for arms training and ideological indoctrinations on *Jehad*.⁶ Rehman has recruited educated youths from Nalgonda, Bijapur, Gulbarga, Udupi, Mangalore, Kolar and Ramnagar districts of the Karnataka state.⁷ Based on his information, another top Karnataka based LeT operative, Habeeb alias Mehaboob Ibrahim alias Chopdar was arrested from Bagalkot in north Karnataka on 16 January 2006.⁸ Until now police have arrested six persons related to this attack and incidentally all the detained persons are linked to LeT directly or indirectly.

Lashkar operatives had been planning a major strike in Bangalore since the 2001 Jaish-e-Mohammad attack on Indian Parliament. By the end of 2001, the LeT's structure was dislocated when its top commander for all India operations, code-named Abu Adnan, was killed in an encounter in New Delhi. LeT's operational plans in Bangalore were revealed from the records recovered from Manzoor Zahid Chaudhuri, who is

responsible for the 2002 attack on the Akshardham Temple in Gandhinagar.⁹

Security agencies have found evidences of the links between arrested terrorists and the Al-Hadees group based in Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia, where LeT has its cells. Records recovered from LeT operatives reveal their aim to spread terror network across the country especially in South India. Realising their lack of network in this region, LeT has started recruiting youths from Muslim community using job opportunities in the Gulf. The Lashkar continued to build its capability in Bangalore. Shahid Ahmad, a Pakistani national who took charge of all-India Lashkar operations in 2003, focussed on recruiting ethnic-Kashmiri students studying outside the State.¹⁰ In March 2005, the Delhi police eliminated three Lashkar terrorists who had visited Bangalore in December 2004.¹¹ The evidences have clearly emphasized a high-level penetration of the LeT in southern states.

Arrests

Apart from Abdul Rehman's arrest, an Islamic preacher, Basheer Khan Mysoori was arrested in Chennai, Tamil Nadu by the police and two others were also taken in to custody regarding the shooting incident. Four persons were detained two each from Kolar and Mysore districts, reportedly provided

⁶ The recent investigation reports revealed that Abdul Rehman had operational contacts in Pakistan and Bangladesh, besides Andhra Pradesh, Chennai, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka.

⁷ See "LeT plan to blow up Kaiga N-plant," *The Indian Express*, 17 January 2006. The recruits were sent to Bangladesh via Kolkata for arms training. Later they were sent to Balochistan in Pakistan for intensive training after which they return to their native states and plan attacks.

⁸ "One more arrested in IISc attack case," *The Hindustan Times*, 17 January 2006. Habeeb is reported to have worked in Saudi Arabia from 1993 to 2001 and met Rehman in that country.

⁹ See Praveen Swami, "Terrorist attacks was predicted," *The Hindu*, 30 December 2005.

Another LeT operative who recently received a death sentence for his role in the attack on the Red Fort in New Delhi, Mohammad Arif 'Ashfaq,' told during interrogation that a separate terror cell had been ordered to blow up information technology baron Azim Premji's farmhouse.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

vital information related to IISc attack. Recently, two more LeT operatives, Nizamuddin and Noorulla Khan were arrested in Kolar district in Karnataka and police have recovered arms and ammunition from their hideouts.¹² But the investigations so far did not provide any lead for the police to zero in on the man who carried out the attack on the IISc campus.

The police suspect that at least two dozen youngsters hailing from the Nalgonda town (where Abdul Rehman was arrested) in Andhra Pradesh have gone underground. It is believed that they were trained in terrorist camps in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Most of them could have returned to India as 'sleepers' ready to act when their 'operators' give them the green signal. It is possible some of them were involved, directly or indirectly, in the 28 December 2005 attack in the IISc campus.¹³

Further threats

After the terrorist attacks in IISc, a letter faxed to the news papers offices claimed that two suicide bombers targeting Chief Minister's residence and six "Al-Jihadis" were in the city to blast a hotel on occasion of New Year in Bangalore.

During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, the police arrested four Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terrorists and seized

improvised explosive devices (IEDs),¹⁴ which were aimed to attack DGP and Police Commissioner Offices. Earlier, the police task force office in Hyderabad was attacked by a suspected suicide bomber on October 12.¹⁵ An e-mail sent in the name of Al Qaeda on bomb threat to Indian Parliament and US Consulate on December 17, 2005 was traced back to Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu, a hotbed of Al Ummah associated with the Coimbatore bomb blasts in February 1998.¹⁶ At least a dozen people were arrested including a lecturer related to that incident and suspected to have links with proscribed Islamist organizations Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and Al Ummah. Though it doesn't have any significance, an e-mail threat to blast the parliament indicates efforts for revival of Islamist extremism in Tamil Nadu. Further, indicating the presence of LeT and Al Badr militants in New Delhi, the intelligence agencies have warned the government about possible terrorist strikes at military head quarters, government installations and official gatherings in the run-up to the Republic Day celebrations in the capital.¹⁷

Lack of Counter terror initiatives

The Bangalore incident has clearly emphasized that the terrorist groups are diversifying their targets. At least four separate warnings of an imminent strike

¹² "Two more arrested in IISc attack case," *The Hindustan Times*, 25 January 2006. The police sources said that all the six persons arrested in Karnataka were in constant touch with each other and trained to carry out violent militant activities in the state.

¹³ K. Srinivas Reddy, "Nalgonda, a hub of militant activity?," *The Hindu*, 6 January 2006.

¹⁴ "Ahead of PM's visit, terror plot busted in Hyderabad," *The Hindustan Times*, 2 January 2005.

¹⁵ "Explosion: Suicide bomber theory gains strength," *The Hindu*, 14 October 2005.

¹⁶ Jaya Menon, "Day after terror e-mail, Delhi Police join probe in TN," *The Indian Express*, 18 December 2005.

¹⁷ See Devesh K. Pandey, "Delhi Police on alert," *The Hindu*, 5 January 2006.

on information technology facilities were issued in 2005, the last on the basis of interrogation of three Harkat-ul-Jihad terrorists arrested from Kolkata and Hyderabad. In late October, the police arrested three alleged Harkat terrorists, Hilaluddin Khan (Bangladesh national), Nafiqul Biswas (Kolkata resident) and Mohammad Ibrahim (Hyderabad resident) and all three said their organization had intended to target Bangalore.¹⁸ In spite of serious threats from LeT and other terrorist organizations to the southern states, no major city has put in place crisis-response protocols to deal with what experts describe as catastrophic terrorist acts, such as bombings using chemical or biological weapons.¹⁹

The Karnataka government recently has set up an exclusive operation unit, "Operation Tiger Force" trained by the National Security Guards to fight terrorists in Karnataka. The Union Home Ministry has identified the negligence of security forces to share intelligence sources and build a network to counter these threats. It has ordered these respective states to review counter-terrorism procedures in all major cities.

Conclusion

South India seems to become an important terrorist target; the region has country's defence, nuclear and space establishments, information technology (IT) and other hi-tech industries. Terrorist attacks would adversely affect the recent gains in economic field. In 2004-05 software exports from

Karnataka were Rs. 25, 700 crores. This amounted to 35 per cent of the country's total software exports and 58 per cent of South India's software exports. The software exports from Andhra Pradesh were worth Rs. 8,270 crore in 2004-05, while Tamil Nadu recorded an export figure of Rs. 10,703 crore during the same period.²⁰ The growing level of foreign investments and scientific developments in this region contributes much for the national economy and technologically vibrant at the international market.

Until now terrorists have targeted public places, temples, security force check posts etc. The post-Babri Masjid demolition period has created at least some local logistics support for the Islamist terrorists and become fertile soil for their operations in the South. While dozens of casualties claimed in terrorist attacks across the world, Bangalore incident is unlikely to deter international investors. But, it has demonstrated the module of terrorists attempting to break the economic and scientific pillars of the country with the help of their sleeper cells present here. Before 2005, an average of one successful pan-Islamic *Jihadi* terrorist strike per annum in Indian territory outside Jammu and Kashmir state.²¹ In 2005, there were four terrorist strikes – at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh in July, at Hyderabad and Delhi in October and at Bangalore in December. It requires better and efficient intelligence, policing, physical security to soft targets and co-ordination in counter-terror measures among the states.

¹⁸ "Cops foil terror plot," *The Statesman*, 26 December 2005.

¹⁹ Praveen Swami, "Flaws in counter-terror practices," *The Hindu*, 31 December 2005.

²⁰ Jangveer Singh, "Terrorists target centres of growth," *The Tribune*, 11 January 2006.

²¹ B. Raman, "ISI takes Jihad to India's south," *The Pioneer*, 12 January 2006.