

Mumbai rocked by deadly attacks

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Wednesday, 26 November 2008

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Report: Little-known group claims India attacks

Nov 26 05:38 PM US/Eastern

MUMBAI, India (AP) - A media report says a little-known group, the Deccan Mujahideen, has claimed responsibility for the Mumbai terrorist attacks.

The Press Trust of India news agency said Thursday the group sent emails to several media outlets.

Teams of heavily armed gunmen attacked a crowded train station in southern Mumbai and Leopold's restaurant, a well-known Mumbai landmark, along with the two hotels and a police station.

Officials say at least 78 people were killed and another 200 wounded. In addition, the attackers were holding hostages Thursday morning.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. Check back soon for further information. AP's earlier story is below.

MUMBAI, India (AP)—A top police official says gunmen are holding hostages at two luxury Mumbai hotels after opening fire on a crowded Mumbai train station, hotels and a restaurant popular with tourists.

A.N. Roy, a senior police officer in Mumbai, says the hostages are being held at the Taj Mahal and Oberoi hotels.

Teams of heavily armed gunmen attacked a crowded train station in southern Mumbai and Leopold's restaurant, a well-known Mumbai landmark, along with the two hotels and a police station.

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Mumbai rocked by deadly attacks

Gunmen have opened fire at a number of sites in the Indian city of Mumbai (Bombay), killing at least 80 people and injuring about 200 more.

Police said shooting was continuing and that the incidents were co-ordinated terrorist attacks. Gunmen have taken hostages at two hotels and a hospital.

At least seven sites have been targeted across India's financial capital.

A fire is sweeping through the Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai's most famous hotel which is now ringed by troops.

The BBC's Andrew Whitehead says a claim of responsibility by a little-known group, Deccan Mujahideen, may harden suspicions that Islamic radicals are involved.

But there are other possible culprits, our correspondent says.

The motive is far from clear - but the attacks come amid elections in several Indian states, including in disputed Kashmir.

In the latest developments:

• Commandos have surrounded two hotels, the Taj Mahal Palace and the Oberoi, where gunmen are reported to be holding dozens of hostages, including foreigners

- Police say an explosion heard inside the Oberoi was from a hand grenade, and flames and a massive plume of smoke are billowing from the Taj Mahal hotel
- The head of Mumbai's anti-terrorism unit and two other senior officers are among those killed, according to local TV
- A witness told local television that the gunmen were looking for people with British or US passports
- The US and the UK have both condemned the attacks and Washington says it is "assessing the hostage situation"

Gunmen opened fire at about 2300 local time at sites in southern Mumbai including a train station, two five-star hotels, a hospital and a restaurant popular with tourists.

Police said the gunmen had fired indiscriminately.

"The terrorists have used automatic weapons and in some places grenades have been lobbed," said AN Roy, police commissioner of Maharashtra state.

At least 10 people were killed at the main station Chhatrapati Shivaji railway station, they said.

Some gunmen were still holed up in buildings that had been targeted, officials said.

Mr Roy said gunmen were holding people hostage at the Taj Mahal Palace and Oberoi hotels.

Local TV images showed blood-splattered streets, bodies being taken into ambulances and dramatic shots of what appeared to fresh blasts inside the Taj Mahal hotel.

One eyewitness told the BBC he had seen a gunman opening fire in the Taj Mahal's lobby.

He said he had seen people fall before he fled the lobby.

"All I saw was one man on foot carrying a machine gun type of weapon - which I then saw him firing from and I saw people hitting the floor, people right next to me," he said.

There has been a wave of bombings in Indian cities in recent months which has left scores of people dead.

Most of the attacks have been blamed on Muslim militants, although police have also arrested suspected Hindu extremists.

A series of attacks in Mumbai in July 2006 killed almost 190 people and injured more than 700.

Bombs were detonated on commuter trains during rush hour.

Police accused Pakistan's intelligence agency of planning the attacks, which they said were carried out by an Islamist militant group, Lashkar-e-Toiba.

Pakistan rejected the allegation, saying there was no evidence that its intelligence staff were involved.

The shootings come at a time when ties between India and Pakistan have improved, and days after Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari told a summit in Delhi that Pakistan would not be first to carry out a missile strike on India.

The two countries have a joint anti-terror mechanism whereby they are supposed to share information on terrorist attacks.

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/7751160.stm

Terror attacks in Mumbai; 80 dead, over 900 injured
27 Nov 2008, 0224 hrs IST, TIMES NEWS NETWORK & AGENCIES

Mumbai: In one of the most violent terror attacks on Indian soil, Mumbai came under an unprecedented night attack as terrorists used heavy machine guns, including AK-47s, and grenades to strike at the city's most high-profile targets -- the hyper-busy CST (formerly VT) rail terminus; the landmark Taj Hotel at the Gateway and the luxury Oberoi Trident at Nariman Point; the domestic airport at Santa Cruz; the Cama and GT hospitals near CST; the Metro Adlabs multiplex and Mazgaon Dockyard -- killing at least 80 and sending more than 900 to hospital, according to latest reports. (Watch)

The attacks have taken a tragic toll on the city's top police brass: The high-profile chief of the anti-terror squad Hemant

Karkare was killed; Mumbai's additional commissioner of police (east) Ashok Kamte was gunned down outside the Metro; and celebrated encounter specialist Vijay Salaskar was also killed. (Watch)

The attacks appeared to be aimed at getting international attention as the terrorists took up to 40 British nationals and other foreigners hostage. The chairman of Hindustan Unilever Harish Manwani and CEO of the company Nitin Paranjpe were among the guests trapped at the Oberoi. All the internal board members of the multinational giant were reported to be holed up in the Oberoi hotel.

Two terrorists were reported holed up inside the Oberoi Hotel. Fresh firing has been reported at Oberoi and Army has entered the hotel to flush out the terrorists.

An unknown outfit, Deccan Mujahideen, has sent an email to news organizations claiming that it carried out the Mumbai attacks.

The Army and Navy in Mumbai were put on alert. 65 Army commandos and 200 NSG commandos were being rushed to Mumbai, Home Minister Shivraj Patil said.

The Navy commandos too have been asked to assist the police. Special secretary M L Kumawat is in constant touch with the state police.

Some media reports attributed the attack to Lashkar-e-Taiba. There were also unconfirmed reports that some of the terrorists came in by sea. A boat laden with explosives was recovered later at night off the Gateway of India.

Well after midnight, sources said two of the terrorists were shot and wounded at Girgaum in south Mumbai. The two were driving in a commandeered silver-coloured Skoda car. Earlier, these men had sprayed bullets from a police Bolero, outside the Metro Adlabs multiplex.

The attacks occurred at the busiest places. Besides hotels and hospitals, terrorists struck at railway stations, Crawford Market, Wadi Bunder and on the Western Express Highway near the airport. Several of these places are within a one-km radius of the commissioner of police's office.

"This is definitely a terrorist strike. Seven places have been attacked with automatic weapons and grenades. Terrorists are still holed up in three locations Taj and Oberoi hotels and GT Hospital. Encounters are on at all three places," said Maharashtra DGP A N Roy.

St George's Hospital and G T Hospital were said to have received 75 bodies and more than 250 injured people, additional municipal commissioner R A Rajeev said. Bombay Hospital got two bodies and 30 injured people were admitted there; Cooper Hospital, Vile Parle, got three dismembered bodies.

Three of the deaths occurred inside the Taj and one G T Hospital attendant died in a shootout inside the hospital. There were reports of people cowering under tables and chairs at both the Taj as well as G T Hospital.

Metro Junction resident Manoj Goel said: "My brother, Manish, died in the firing at Colaba's Hamaal Galli." Cops fired back at the men -- probably from one of the Lashkar groups, dressed in black and with backpacks and SRPF, Crime Branch, ATS and teams of military commandos were summoned to the spot. Train services at CST were suspended and all roads leading to and from south Mumbai were blockaded.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh cut short his Kerala visit and was returning to Mumbai. He described the situation in Mumbai as "very serious".

Deshmukh promised "stringent action" against the assailants but the mood across Mumbai was not so optimistic.

There were reports of firing around several landmark buildings in the Colaba-Nariman Point area, including the Taj hotel, Oberoi and other tourist attractions and pubs like Leopold's. The top floor of Oberoi was said to be on fire amid reports of blasts in the area and blood-smeared bodies were being brought out of the Taj lobby.

Terrorists were said to be holed up at the Taj as well as G T Hospital and cops scampered to cordon off these places. A white flag was seen fluttering from an Oberoi Hotel window around 11.20 pm, where a blast was said to have occurred.

The blast on the Western Express Highway -- near Centaur Hotel outside the airport -- occurred in a taxi, deputy commissioner of police Nissar Tamboli said.

The firing and bombing started close to the Gateway of India. The gunbattle then moved on towards CST and raged on for over an hour from 10 pm, sending commuters running out of the station.

The assailants also fired into the crowd at CST and people on the trains and then ran out of the station themselves and into neighbouring buildings, including Cama Hospital, after being challenged by cops.

SRPF personnel then entered the iconic BMC building -- just opposite CST -- to take aim at the assailants, BMC commissioner Jairaj Phatak said. "We fear some of the assailants are still inside the station and we want to catch them if they come out," a police official said.

Vikhroli police station senior inspector Habib Ansari was on his way to work from his Colaba home when he saw two armed men, with sophisticated weaponry, trying to run into bylanes near the Gateway of India. "I rushed back to Colaba and all policemen, including GRP and RPF personnel, were called up," he added.

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<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-3761410,prtpage-1.cms>

From Times Online November 26, 2008

Foreigners targeted in co-ordinated Bombay attacks

At least 80 people were killed and 100 taken hostage as suspected Islamic terrorists mounted a series of co-ordinated attacks on Bombay tonight, targeting British and American citizens.

Gunmen armed with automatic weapons, bombs and grenades stormed two luxury hotels, the city's main railway station and a backpackers' bar in the south of India's financial capital.

In the early hours scores of people were being held hostage in the Taj Mahal Palace hotel and the nearby Oberoi hotel, both locations popular with wealthy foreigners. Paramilitary forces had gathered around both buildings and appeared to be readying to storm the buildings.

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Britons caught up in the terror strikes said they had been singled out. "I guess they were after foreigners, because they were asking for British or American passports," Rakesh Patel, a British guest at the Taj told an Indian television crew. "They had bombs." At 3.30am, five hours after the attackers first struck, the Taj Mahal, a Bombay icon, was set ablaze and gun fire was heard inside. The fire looked to gut the uppermost part of the hotel, where it was feared several foreigners were being held.

A bar popular with backpackers, Leopolds, was also attacked. Pools of blood and bullet-scarred walls bore witness to gunmen who victims said fired "indiscriminately".

A Spanish guest said: "I was in the restaurant inside Oberoi and I saw this series of gunshots and death which I don't want to see again".

Near the international airport the wreckage of a taxi apparently destroyed by a bomb were found. Three senior policemen, including the chief of Bombay's anti-terror squad, were killed in stand-offs with terrorist gunmen.

Security experts said it was the first time they could recall gunmen seeking to take hostages in India, a country grown used to terrorist bomb blasts. The attacks were centred on Bombay's prosperous south, home to many of India's wealthiest citizens and a legion of ex-pats.

A previously unheard-of group, the Deccan Mujahideen, claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Early accounts were confused as mobile phone networks jammed and the city's police control room was flooded with calls from a terrified public. At first, it was thought that the violence was part of a turf war between mafia gangs. As the attacks continued, a co-ordinated terror attack became a more tenable explanation.

A police spokesman said: "We have only a very tenuous grasp on what is happening so far. People are scared. The incidents being reported are so many. Gunmen are under siege at several locations but we are worried about hitting

civilians." In Bombay, memories are still fresh of July 11, 2006, when 200 people were killed in seven bomb blasts on the city's train network.

Tonight's attacks showed all the signs of an al-Qaeda strategy — picking on vulnerable Western "soft targets", experts suggested.

Intelligence "chatter" in recent weeks had indicated that Al Qaeda was plotting an attack to "grab headlines" before Barack Obama took office in the White House.

India is also battling a resurgent domestic terror threat. Delhi, Jaipur, Ahmedabad and Bangalore have recently hit by elaborate terror campaigns that have claimed more than 150 lives over the past six months. The Indian Mujahideen, a previously unknown Islamist terror group, has claimed responsibility.

The British MEP Sajjad Karim, who was part of the delegation staying at Taj Mahal Palace, said in a mobile telephone call: "I was in the lobby of the hotel when gunmen came in and people started running.

"A gunman just stood there spraying bullets around. I ran into the hotel kitchen and then we were shunted into a restaurant in the basement. We are now in the dark in this room and we've barricaded all the doors. It's really bad."

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article5240126.ece>
