

TERRORIST ATTACK PROFILE

OVERVIEW

On 3 March 2009, the Sri Lankan cricket team during their visit to Pakistan to play Test Series came under a terrorist attack in Lahore. The attack took place on the morning of the third day of the second Test, when the team, riding on a bus, was heading to the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore from the hotel. The attack left six Sri Lankan cricketers slightly injured, and killed seven police personnel guarding the team. The driver of another bus carrying the Umpires was also killed.

INCIDENT:

According to reports, 12 gunmen attacked Sri Lanka's cricket team in Lahore with Kalashnikovs, hand grenades and rockets, wounding six players, a British coach and a Pakistani umpire, and killing at least seven (six policeman and one civilian).¹ The 12 terrorists reportedly arrived in rickshaws.² A Hyundai saloon car, bearing registration number PG-2959, was also used in the attack. It has been learnt that the car was bought about 10 to 11 days before the March 3 attack who provided fake documents to the seller. In the meantime, the terrorists painted the car white and used it during the 3 March 2009 attack³. The said terrorists took positions and surrounded the two buses carrying the Sri Lankan cricket team and umpires as well as the police escort near Liberty Chowk (roundabout), and fired on it for 25 minutes and then made good their escape. They were armed with rockets, hand grenades and Kalashnikovs. The attack was caught on CCTV cameras and later shown by the public and private TV channels. The cricket series was immediately called off, and the Sri Lankan team was lifted by a military helicopter from the ground of Ghaddafi Stadium and flew back to their homeland immediately.⁴

DATE:

Tuesday, 3 March 2009 (08:39 am PST)⁵

LOCATION:

Liberty Market Roundabout, about 200 metres from the Gaddafi Stadium, Gulberg, Lahore, Pakistan.⁶

PERPETRATED BY:

The intelligence agencies probing the March 3 attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore have named the banned Lashkar-i-Jhangvi as the group behind the incident. The secret agencies are convinced, after conducting a thorough investigation and sifting through large amounts of evidence that Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) had masterminded and carried out the Lahore attack. The intelligence officials also came to the conclusion that Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), which was accused by India among others to be the prime suspects of Mumbai Attacks in November 2008, was not involved in this particular attack. It has emerged that Matiur Rehman of LeJ was the mastermind of the terrorist attack, while Mohsin (who was involved

¹ Obama 'deeply concerned' over Lankan Team Attack, The News, March 04, 2009

² Mohammad Jamil, India Behind 3/3 Terror Attack? The Post, March 05, 2009

³ Salis bin Perwaiz, LJ Blamed for Attack on SL team, The News, March 22, 2009

⁴ EDITORIAL: Al Qaeda strikes in Lahore, Daily Times, March 04, 2009

⁵ New Footage Shows Attackers Escaping, Daily Times, March 05, 2009

⁶ Obama 'deeply concerned' over Lankan Team Attack, The News, March 04, 2009

in the Rawalpindi attack on Gen Pervez Musharraf in December 2003 which was also attributed to the LeJ) was present during the Lahore attack. Certain Pakistani officials believe that the attack was planned with the coordination of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) led by Baitullah Mehsud.⁷ However, it is still premature to say anything since the investigation is underway.

TARGET:

Sri Lankan cricket team.

TACTIC:

A dozen highly trained masked gunmen with backpacks scattered in three groups: first targeted the bus carrying the team with a rocket launcher (which misfired), then tossed hand grenades (which could not hit the vehicle) and later opened indiscriminate fire, killing seven people including six policemen, and wounding six members of the Sri Lankan squad⁸. From the huge quantity of the sophisticated ammunition (heavy weapons) and other paraphernalia, including edibles carried by the terrorists, one can reasonably assume that this was not required for a hit and run operation. It has also been presumed that the plan A was to attack the hotel where Sri Lankan and Pakistani teams were lodged and having failed due to tight security at the hotel they carried out plan B at liberty market.⁹

Some also believe that the purpose of the attackers could be to hijack the buses and then put political demands to the government. However, the terrorists attacked the two buses when challenged by police escort and the bus driver tried to speed off the bus towards the Stadium without caring for his life.

IMPACT:

The attack was aimed at damaging the credibility of the government and has affected Pakistan in various significant ways:

- Affected the prospect of international cricket being played in Pakistan for sometime in future.
- The terrorists attempted to generate strains between Sri Lanka and Pakistan, which enjoy extreme cordial and strategic relations. However, the terrorists failed to derail their relations.
- The terrorist attack gave an impression that apart from Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and North West Frontier Province (NWFP) where the Taliban-Al Qaeda nexus has eroded the writ of the Pakistani State, even the mainland Pakistan is unsafe and home to potentially dreadful terrorist groups which can play havoc with the state and society whenever they desire.

⁷ Salis bin Perwaiz, LJ Blamed for Attack on SL team, The News, March 22, 2009

⁸ Amir Mir, Who is to Blame for the 3/3 incident? The News, March 04, 2009

⁹ Mohammad Jamil, India Behind 3/3 Terror Attack? The Post, March 05, 2009

ATTACK DETAILS:

VISUAL AIDS:



Graphical Guide¹⁰

¹⁰ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7920303.stm

WITNESS ACCOUNTS:

- "As we approached the city's Liberty Roundabout, I slowed down. Just then what seemed to be a rocket was fired at my coach, but it missed and I think flew over the top of the vehicle. Almost immediately afterwards a person ran in front of the bus and threw a grenade in our direction. But it rolled underneath the coach and did not seem to cause that much damage. Soon after that I was aware that the vehicles had come under attack by firearms. I was shocked and stunned." He said he saw several of the gunmen, all aged between 20 and 30, "many sporting beards". (Bus driver, Khalil Ahmed).¹¹
- "The gunmen targeted the wheels of the bus first and then the bus. We all dived to the floor to take cover." (Sri Lankan cricketer, Mahela Jayawardene).¹²
- "As the Sri Lankan team was approaching the stadium for the test match this morning, about a half a kilometre away from the stadium, two cars entered the roundabout... and fired a grenade. As they did this, three other gunmen ran into the roundabout, where the bus was, opened fire on a police vehicle - where a police officer was killed - and then opened fire on the bus, spraying the bus we understand with machine gun fire." (Graham Usher, a British journalist, who was approaching the area just as the attack took place).¹³
- "People got straight out of their cars; they were panicking and running in the road. All I could think of was that I might be killed by a stray bullet... It was the worst day of my life." (Ahmad Hassan, a local resident, as he was driving to work).¹⁴

ATTACK ANALYSIS:

TARGET ASSESSMENT:

The target, the Sri Lankan cricket team offered three advantages: (i) to further damage the image of Pakistan by projecting it as a failed and unsafe country where terrorists roam freely (ii) affecting Pakistan in the realm of sports, and jeopardising any future prospects of international sports and prevent tourists from visiting the country in the foreseeable future (iii) to negatively affect ties with Sri Lanka with whom Pakistan enjoys extremely friendly relations. Sports team was a prized target for extremists, despite the fact that all of the cricketers were saved.

TACTIC ASSESSMENT:

From the huge quantity of the sophisticated ammunition and other paraphernalia including edibles, and from the tactics used by the terrorists, one can reasonably assume that this was not a hit and run operation. Federal State Minister, Nabeel Gabol, hinted at the recovery of Indian weapons from the site, esp. the rocket launchers¹⁵). It appears that the plan A was to attack the hotel where Sri Lankan and Pakistani teams were lodged and having failed due to tight security at the hotel they carried out plan B at liberty market killing 6 police personnel.¹⁶ Each rucksack contained half a kilogram of almonds,

¹¹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7920303.stm

¹² http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7920303.stm

¹³ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7920303.stm

¹⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7920303.stm

¹⁵ Amir Mir, Who is to Blame for the 3/3 incident? The News, March 04, 2009

¹⁶ Mohammad Jamil, India Behind 3/3 Terror Attack? The Post, March 05, 2009

half a kilo of dried fruit, biscuits and water bottles, which could have kept them going for several days. Police have suggested they could have been planning to board the bus and put on the suicide vests that some were carrying, enabling them to hold the entire team captive. The exit of the bus could have led to the terrorists dumping their arms and supplies and leaving.

Weapons left behind included 84mm Carl Gustav recoilless rifles and RPG-22 rocket propelled anti-tank grenades. Reportedly, both the weapons are issued to Indian Army and Special Forces and are weapons not typically found with the Taliban militants. A senior defence correspondent, while remaining anonymous, has stated that the choice of weapons as well as other evidence, clearly indicates India's hand in the present attack and is being seen as a "response" to the Mumbai attacks.¹⁷

The tactics used reveal the operation was carefully planned, prepared and executed. With the coordinated use of multiple gunmen, armed with explosives, the execution resulted into a thorough commando action. The ordered arrangement and manoeuvre of combat elements in relation to each other and to the enemy to achieve combat objectives bore the hallmarks of the tactics used in the Mumbai terror strike coupled with the use of lethal and sophisticated weapons.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

No visiting player lost his life. The International Cricket Commission (ICC) will find it difficult to hold the 2011 World Cup in Pakistan jointly with India and Sri Lanka. India is likely to achieve political gain. This act of terrorism also gives credence to international military interventions, especially from US to handle the menace of terrorism¹⁸.

The ICC has said Pakistan is unlikely to stage international matches in the near future and plans to review whether Pakistan can co-host the 14 matches of the World Cup. The first refusal of a cricket team to play a match in Pakistan has come from New Zealand that has cancelled their tour of Pakistan scheduled for later this year¹⁹. Perhaps the only debate going on after the attack on the Sri Lankan cricketers is with regard to security lapses and new measures to prevent such terrorist attacks from taking place in future. Nevertheless, the attack has the potential to affect Pakistan's trust with regional states in case the investigations fail to yield clear results and fix responsibility."Cricket won't be played in Pakistan for the foreseeable future. Pakistan look like they will become a wandering cricket team now. They will be playing at neutral venues, because you can guarantee that there won't be games there. Obviously, there is no chance of the Champions Trophy or the World Cup going ahead there." said Geoff Lawson, the former Australia fast bowler, who coached Pakistan until last October.²⁰

GROUP ASSESSMENT:

The secret agencies are convinced, after conducting a thorough investigation and sifting through large amounts of evidence that the Matiur Rehman group of the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi had masterminded and carried out the Lahore attack while the Lashkar-i-Taiba, which was accused by India among others to be the prime suspects, was not involved in this particular

¹⁷ India's Hand Seen, Statesman, March 4, 2009

¹⁸ Shireen M Mazari, Lahore Terror: Blow to Friends, Opportunity for Foes, The News, March 04, 2009

¹⁹ Attack and After, The Post, Mar 5-9, 2009

²⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2009/mar/03/geoff-lawson-sri-lanka-attack>

attack.²¹The Lahore assault bore similarities to November's terrorist attack in the Indian financial capital of Mumbai and the Pakistani group Lashkar-e-Taiba was held responsible by India for that attack. Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels have denied involvement in the attack under consideration.²²

Nevertheless, according to a source report made public selectively in media, "It has reliably been learnt that RAW (Indian intelligence agency) has assigned its agents the task to target Sri Lankan cricket team during its current visit to Lahore, especially while travelling between the hotel and stadium or at hotel during their stay. 2. It is evident that RAW intends to show Pakistan a security risk state for sports events, particularly when the European and the Indian teams have already postponed their proposed visits considering it a high security risk to visit Pakistan. 3. RAW has also collected photographs of leaders of Jamaatud Daawa (proscribed) and its establishments to target them. 4. Extreme vigilance and heightened security arrangements indicated."²³

Former ISI chief Gen (ret'd) Hameed Gul, Federal State Minister Nabeel Gabol and Lahore Commissioner Khushro Pervaiz, among others, have not ruled out Indian involvement in the attacks.²⁴

However, investigations are still underway and nothing conclusive can be said at the moment.

²¹ Salis bin Perwaiz, LJ Blamed for Attack on SL team, The News, March 22, 2009

²² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/05/sri-lanka-cricket-team-attack-sri-lanka-cricket-team>

²³ Ansar Abbasi, Govt was Warned about Attack but did Nothing, The News, March 04, 2009

²⁴ India's Hand Seen, Statesman, March 4, 2009

ATTACK INVESTIGATION:

INCIDENT:

Security personnel questioned some 15 suspects in connection with the attacks on the Sri Lankan cricket team. Police apprehended another armed suspect near the Liberty Market roundabout when he was trying to flee²⁵.

POST-INCIDENT:

Pakistani Foreign Minister said Pakistan has some details and important leads that may eventually help unearth people responsible for this terrible act, which it would share with Sri Lanka. An inquiry tribunal of the High Court on 24 March, 2009 (for attacks on the team) recorded the statements of the Home Secretary, Inspector General of Police and other senior officials of the Punjab government. However, there are certain post-incident speculations that non-adherence to standard procedures in Blue Book, despite clear warnings from intelligence, was one reason what made the work of the shooters easy.²⁶

The Lahore assailants carried significant quantities of food, bandages and antiseptic liquid. Each of the gunmen wore a bulky rucksack. Each rucksack contained half a kilogram of almonds, half a kilo of dried fruit, biscuits and water bottles, which could have kept them going for several days. Police have suggested they could have been planning to board the bus and put on the suicide vests that some were carrying, enabling them to hold the entire team captive. The exit of the bus could have led to the terrorists dumping their arms and supplies and leaving. Police detained 50 people who had fallen under suspicion.²⁷ Pakistani authorities also issued sketches of four of the gunmen who ambushed Sri Lanka's cricket team as well.²⁸

CASE FINDINGS:

Premature to give a conclusive judgement as the investigations are under way, as stated in the post-incident details.

²⁵ Attack and After, The Post, Mar 5-9, 2009

²⁶ The Post, Mar 5-9, 2009

²⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/05/pakistan-sri-lanka-team-hostages>

²⁸ Matthew Weaver, Sketches of Suspects in Attack on Sri Lankan Team Released, The Guardian, 5 March 2009

ATTACK RESPONSE:

GOVERNMENT:

The government of Pakistan has condemned the attack, which according to government is a conspiracy to undermine the political and diplomatic ties between the two countries. The President of Pakistan assured his Sri Lankan counterpart that thorough investigations would be carried out and the perpetrators shall be taken to task. He brought attention to the fact that strict security measures were taken for safety of the cricket team and devoted policemen saved their lives while sacrificing their own. The Prime Minister of Pakistan reiterated the same commitment²⁹. A special investigation team has been constituted for this purpose by the government of Pakistan³⁰. The Provincial government of Punjab, Pakistan, has offered a 10m rupee (£88,000) reward for information leading to the attackers' arrests.³¹

The Governor of the Punjab Province, Salman Taseer, pointed out the similarity of the attack to the Mumbai attacks in November 2008³² and the Rehman Malik, Advisor to Prime Minister on Interior Affairs did not rule out the possibility of foreign hand.³³ The President of Sri Lanka condemned the attack and the Foreign Minister did not rule out the possibility that Tamil Tigers were involved in the attack on his country's cricket team.³⁴ However, LTTE's spokesman, Thileepan, told the Radio division of *Australia's Special Broadcasting Service* on 4 March "We don't have any connections with those people (Lahore attackers)."³⁵ The government of Sri Lanka has shown confidence in Pakistan and the investigations undertaken. The government of Sri Lanka has admitted being victim of terrorism itself but it was the first time the Sri Lankans were targeted outside. However, the seriousness shown by Pakistan over the issue has been registered well in Colombo. In fact, the foreign minister of Sri Lanka said the cricket team would give highest consideration to the invitation extended to it to undertake visit again and would not allow Pakistan's isolation in the cricket.³⁶

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

The international community unequivocally condemned the attack. They expressed their concerns that Pakistan, already wrecked by the Taliban and Al Qaeda -linked militant violence, and now the assault --- a huge setback to the government in Islamabad --- is a clarion call for future terrorist attacks. The international community, overall, has condemned the attack on Sri Lanka's cricket team and expressed concern over the security situation in the country while assuring Pakistan its full support in tackling the menace of terrorism.

²⁹ Asim Yasin, President, PM phone Lankan President, The News, March 04, 2009

³⁰ SIG joins Police Probe into Lankan Team Attack, The News, March 05, 2009

³¹ Saeed Shah/David Pallister, Pakistan Police Claim Arrests Over Gun Attack, The Guardian, March 04, 2009

³² EDITORIAL: Al Qaeda strikes in Lahore, Daily Times, March 04, 2009

³³ The Amir Mir, Who is to Blame for the 3/3 incident? The News, March 04, 2009

³⁴ Lahore Attacks: Sri Lanka FM Hints at LTTE Role, The News, March 05, 2009

³⁵ <http://news.in.msn.com/international/article.aspx?cp-documentid=1901017>

³⁶ The News, March 05, 2009

United States was deeply concerned and the US State Department called it a “vicious attack on innocent civilians³⁷. Both Great Britain and the United States share a deep interest in ensuring that neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan are safe havens for terrorist activity, the new policy of President Obama shows his seriousness enough. The incident is likely to be an important factor in US policy review toward Afghanistan and Pakistan and the US President would make announcements ahead of the NATO summit in April about the direction the United States would take. Australia and Turkey have strongly condemned the incident. Australia has promised to stand shoulder to shoulder with Pakistan and affirmed their strong friendship with Pakistan. Australia also offered to send a specialised team to Pakistan to assist in the ongoing investigations.

The ICC has said Pakistan is unlikely to stage international matches in the near future and plans to review whether Pakistan can co-host the 14 matches of the World Cup³⁸. The first refusal of a cricket team to play a match in Pakistan has come from New Zealand that has cancelled their tour of Pakistan scheduled for later this year. As far as the 2011 cricket World Cup, which is scheduled to be hosted jointly by India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, final decision would be taken by the ICC.

India also condemned the attack and accused the LeT to be the prime suspect³⁹. It also reiterated the fact that despite Pakistan’s repeated denial, terrorism is flourishing without check in the country and its sinews.

PRIVATE BUSINESS:

This attack can have an extremely adverse impact on Pakistan’s economy at a time when the economy is already in difficulties. Pakistani investors and the business class are likely to send their capital abroad if extremism and terrorism continue to expand their domain.

Previously, cricket has been used as track two diplomacy to dissolve tensions between India and Pakistan. The Indian Premier League announced late on 22 March that it was shifting the series offshore and IPL will now be hosted by South Africa.. IPL chairman Lalit Modi added that it "would bring \$100 million of revenue to the British economy. Anybody in a recession would want to have us."⁴⁰ Taking the tournament outside will impact the revenue.

SOCIETY:

People all over Pakistan were shocked by the attack. It represents a major threat to civic order and raises questions about the capacity of the government to fulfil its security obligations towards the citizenry. The repeated challenges by armed groups raise doubts about the government’s primacy and undermine its credibility. These developments also generate the impression that violent groups may overwhelm state authorities in parts of the country or make them irrelevant altogether. The government may have to negotiate with these groups for its survival rather than protect citizens from them.

"How do you expect a foreign team to come to Pakistan now? We took pride in hosting our guests. This image has taken a beating. It's sad for Pakistan," Wasim Akram, former captain Pakistani team, told Mobile ESPN over phone from Lahore. “This was not a normal terrorist attack. This was to destabilise the Pakistan economy and the country.” Imran Khan said.⁴¹

³⁷ Obama ‘deeply concerned’ over Lankan Team Attack, The News, March 04, 2009

³⁸ Attack and After, The Post, Mar 5-9, 2009

³⁹ Salis bin Perwaiz, LJ Blamed for Attack on SL team, The News, March 22, 2009

⁴⁰ Amanda Hodge, S Africa Sweetens Offer to Host IPL, The Australian, March 25, 2009

⁴¹ <http://www.anorak.co.uk/media/203242.html>

The society has seen such destabilizing factors at other occasions in the past too. Recently, female dancers were ordered to cover up and theatre timings were shifted to earlier in the evening in an effort to encourage more families to attend and to pre-empt criticism from religious extremists. The measures did not prevent bombs going off at two theatres last months in Lahore.⁴²

SECURITY IMPLICATIONS:

Some describe the attack as a well thought-out plan orchestrated possibly by the militants, furious over recent actions taken by the government in the aftermath of the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, especially the arrest of several leading leaders facing court trial.

These actions will discourage international community to isolate Pakistan, making it easier for militant groups to launch a cultural and military offensive against Pakistani state and society. American presence in Afghanistan may have been the initial cause of their emergence. However, now these groups have an agenda of overwhelming the Pakistani state and society. The Pakistani Taliban and their affiliates and other militant groups are expanding their domain in Pakistan, and their efforts to impose their world-view on people in different places are designed to show to concerned people and the rest of the world that the Pakistan state is on the retreat, that they are a reality that will have to be recognised.⁴³ The incident is likely to be an important factor in US policy review toward Afghanistan and Pakistan.

⁴² www.guardian.co.uk

⁴³ The Colombo Times, 8 March, 2009