Spot Report
Serial Bomb Blasts in Ahmedabad (Gujarat), India
26 July 2008

The Incident
On 26 July 2008, 16 simultaneous bomb blasts took place in Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat State, in India, which killed 49 people and injured more than 150.\(^1\) The synchronized blasts took place in the evening between 7.30-8.15 pm (India Standard Time). According to some reports, the bombs took between 7-10 minute intervals in seven major areas. The multiple blasts occurred within a range of 200 to 500 meters and between 10 to 30 seconds apart.\(^2\) In addition to the public places, the terrorists also targeted two hospitals where the injured were being brought for medical treatment.

The blasts occurred in Sarkhej, Maninagar, Bapunagar, Thakkarbapanagar, Naroda, Raipur Narol, Sarangpur and Meghaninagar. The last bombs went off in the Civil Hospital and LG Hospital where injured were being brought for medical treatment.\(^3\) Both the hospitals were located in the Meghaninagar area of the city.\(^4\) Similarly, all the bomb blasts, barring one, took place on the eastern bank of the Sabarmati River in the old city area, while one happened in Sarkhej located on the west bank.\(^5\)

Map and Pictures

Public and State Reaction

According to eyewitnesses, the bombs were planted in public places to incur maximum casualties. An eyewitness said, “the sight was unimaginable. I saw people flying in the air like objects.” Another eyewitness told the investigators, “he saw people fly in the air. It was ghastly.”6 Another eyewitness reported that he “saw a man park a bicycle near Ashapura tea stall in Thakkarbapa Nagar around 6.15 pm and leave. He was fair, clean-shaven and must be around 30. I thought he was a labourer. Soon, a blast shook the area and we realized the bomb was kept on this bicycle.”7 An eyewitness strolling with his wife in the area where a bomb blast took place said, “we could not believe what we saw. Bus number 150, that connects Sarkhej and Odhav, had been ripped apart. We saw a body fly out of the bus like a missile and panes flung far and wide. The sight was awful as a number of school children ran out of the bus, their school uniforms soaked in blood.”8 Another witness said that he “saw an old man die in front me. First was a low intensity blast. Then came two big blasts, making people run for cover. It caused a near stampede.”9

The Indian President, Prathiba Patel and Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh condemned the terrorist attacks.10 The Australian government condemned the bomb attacks in Ahmedabad and Bangalore, saying it is of great concern that India is facing a series of terrorist attacks in its cities which are taking a terrible toll on ordinary people.”11 The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, condemned in the "strongest terms" the series of bombings in Bangalore and Ahmedabad and stressed that no cause or grievance

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 NSG team rushed to Ahmedabad, Deccan Herald, 27 July 2008
11 ‘Australia Condemns Indian Blasts’, Herald Sun, 28 July 2008
can justify terrorist acts. The European Union described the terrorist attacks as “unacceptable”, and expressed its solidarity with India.

Modus Operandi
The terrorists employed various methods for carrying out the serial blasts, which employed fixed bombs in parks, public transport busses, bicycles as well as a motorcar. According to a report, most of the bombs were planted on bicycles in tiffins (boxes in which one carry food) contained in blue polythene bags, while the bombs in the hospitals were placed in automobiles, employing TNT and locally available fertilizers to make the bombs. Police sources divulged that the bombs utilized ammonium nitrate and resembled the devices used in Bangalore on 25 July 2008. The Indian police also suspected that LPG bottles were also used for maximum impact in the two bombs that targeted the two hospitals. According to reports, 5 kg LPG cylinders were strapped along with ammonium nitrate mix to create greater heat and power. One of the bomb attacks on the hospital employed an automobile whose registration plate number GJ6C9718 was recovered from the site of the blast. This would help the government in furthering investigations into the serial blasts. Similarly, table clocks were used as timer devices in the said bomb blasts.

Suspects Behind the Serial Blasts
A less known group, Mujahideen fi-al-Hind (Indian Mujahideen) claimed the responsibility for the Ahmedabad as well as the 25 July serial blasts in Bangalore. According to a 14-page manifesto titled “The Rise of Jihad” e-mailed to the media, the Indian Mujahideen (IM) claimed responsibility for the Bangalore and Ahmedabad attacks. The manifesto stated that the bombings were carried out to avenge the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat, and called all the Muslim brethren to “unite and answer these irresolute kafireen [infidels] of India.”

It is pertinent to mention that IM has claimed similar terrorist attacks in the recent past. In a similar document sent minutes before May 2008 serial bomb blasts in Jaipur (Rajisthan), the IM claimed such bombings, and announced that such terrorist acts were

12 ‘Ban Ki-Moon Condemns Blasts in India’, PTI, 28 July 2008
18 Ibid.
intended “to clearly give our message to Kuffar-e-Hind [the infidels of India] that if Islam and Muslims in this country are not safe then the light of your safety will also go off very soon.” Similarly, near-identical language was used by the IM in a document e-mailed to television stations minutes before the bombing of three court buildings in Uttar Pradesh State in 2007, in which it claimed that attacks were meant to heal the “wounds given by the idol worshipers of India.”

The type and mode of explosives used in the terrorist attacks also bore resemblance. Like the Jaipur serial bomb blasts, the Bangalore and Ahmedabad attacks were mainly aimed at civilians. All the three attacks employed the use of TNT and other easily available chemicals of industrial use, such as ammonium nitrate. Also, the mode of attacks in all the three cases involved hiding or tying the explosives on a bicycle. All the three attacks employed table clocks as timer devices.

The fact that the IM utilizes TNT as explosives in its terrorist attacks makes it different from other decade-old militant groups operating in India, which normally employs military-grade plastic explosive, RDX. This indicates that the group could be comparatively new and has limited knowledge in the making and preparation of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The Indian investigators, however, believe that the IM is a loose coalition of elements from the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba and Bangladesh-based Harkat ul-Jihad-e-Islami (HUJI).

So far, the Indian government has arrested more than 30 people in connection with the serial blasts. One of the arrested persons, Abdul Halim, belonged to SIMI and is accused of involvement in the 2002 Hindu-Muslim communal riots in Gujarat State. Similarly, the Indian police also raided an apartment in Mumbai from where the email was sent to the newspaper regarding IM’s involvement in the serial blasts. Two US nationals were detained for further interrogation on suspicions since their IP address and computer was used for sending the email.

On 27 July 2008, the Indian government recovered four live bombs from Surat, another city in Gujarat State. One bomb was found in a garbage can in Amraiwadi area, while
another bomb was fixed in a wooden box near a hospital. Two cars laden with explosives were also parked in a business centre in the Surat city. In one of the cars, a drum of chemical, most likely to be mixed into a cocktail with ball bearings and 15 kg ammonium nitrate, the principal incendiary in the bombs, was found. Similarly, the devices were timer devices fitted with table clocks. In the other abandoned car, the police found gelatin sticks, timers, ammonium nitrate powder, tiffin boxes and other materials. The materials were enough to manufacture about eight to 10 powerful crude bombs, the kind of devices believed to had been used in the serial blasts. All the bombs were successfully diffused by the law enforcement agencies.

The IM has further threatened to conduct similar attacks in Kerala State. Given the fact that the terrorist outfit had earlier threatened to conduct attacks in Gujarat on the eve of the Jaipur blasts in May 2007 highlights the resolve of the organisation to go ahead with its terrorist agenda. The Indian government needs to strengthen its counter-intelligence mechanism and vigilance to counter terrorism in the country.

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