

October 29th New Delhi Bombings

At least 61 people were killed in a series of near simultaneous explosions in the Indian capital city of New Delhi. Two of the blasts occurred in the crowded areas of Paharajung and Sarojini Nagar market, while the third one was in a Delhi Transport Corporation bus in Govindpuri industrial area. The toll in the serial bomb blasts in the capital went up to 61 today with six people succumbing to injuries overnight.

While four of them, who were injured in the Sarojini Nagar blast, died in the Safdarjung hospital, two others were victims of the Paharganj explosion, police said. A total of 188 people had been injured in last evening's explosions, they said. Most of the casualties were from Sarojini Nagar where 43 people died, while 18 were killed in Paharganj.

The first blast occurred at Paharjung at 17:40 pm IST killing at least 25 persons. The bomb or IED in Paharajung was placed in a motorcycle parked near a jewellery and hardware store. The blast in Govindpuri at about 6.00pm was followed by the one at Sarojini Nagar market five minutes later. At least four people are said to have been injured in the Govindpuri blasts, including the bus driver who located the package in which the bomb was placed and threw it from the bus. 39 people were killed in the blast at the Sarojini Nagar market. A final IED was apparently located by police forces outside a bank in the Chandni Chowk area but was defused by police officers. There is no evidence so far to show that these were acts of suicide terrorism. Nor is there evidence so far of the possible use of remote-control devices or mobile telephones.

The city was crowded with shoppers ahead of Tuesday's Diwali festival, a Hindu holiday where families gather to exchange gifts, light candles and celebrate with fireworks. The blasts also occurred day after Al Quds Day which is observed by Muslims on the last Friday of the Ramadan fasting period and relates to the Israeli occupation of the area in Jerusalem where the holy Al Quds mosque is located.

Indian officials are widely believed to consider Lashkar-e-Toiba the primary culprit. The Pakistan-based group with ties to al Qaeda have been behind many attacks on Indian institutions in the last five years. However responsibility was claimed by an little known Kashmiri militant organisation, Islami Inqilabi Mahaz (Islamic Revolutionary Group). There are as yet unconfirmed reports that a police unit received a warning call 20 minutes in advance of the Paharganj blast.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh denounced the apparently coordinated bombings as terrorist attacks. The Indian government faces opposition from dozens of militant organizations, including Kashmiri separatists and those opposed to the peace process between Pakistan and India.

On October 24, a court in New Delhi convicted 7 persons including Lashkar-e-Toiba militant Mohammad Arif for the December 2000 attack on the historic Red fort in New Delhi. The court found Ashfaq guilty of waging war against India a charge that carries the death penalty as well as murder, criminal conspiracy, cheating and forgery. Ashfaq's wife, Rehmana Farooqi, who made a scene in the court during the verdict, was also convicted. The others found guilty are Matloob Alam, Nazir Ahmed Qasid, his son Farooq Ahmed Qasid, Babar Mohsin Bagahwala and Sadaqat Ali. The court was scheduled to pronounce the sentence on the convictions on Saturday when the blasts occurred. However, the Court deferred the sentencing to Monday in light of the attacks.

Dr Ajai Sahni, of the New Delhi-based Institute for Conflict Management, said there had been some recent intelligence reports suggesting an attack was being planned. This certainly concurs with the American fears of their interests being targeted which was set out in an email sent by Ruth Lincoln, of the American consulate in Chennai on 10th October 2005. "Facilities associated with the United States or locations where US citizens and other foreigners congregate or visit could be targeted. Information received by the US government suggests that attacks could include, among other things, suicide car bombings." Mohammed Majoodi is an Al Qaeda linked terrorist who had seemingly slipped into the country unnoticed earlier in the month and raised alerts which led to the warning. He was being tracked by security services when the explosions occurred. Majoodi also has extensive links with militant groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Toiba

Possible motivations for the attacks are numerous. Prime Minister Singh had just visited the United States in a move which is widely considered to be an upgrading of the good relationship between the two states. The Red Fort judgement is also highly significant and the coordinated timing of the blasts in relation to the judge's findings merely substantiates this likely connection. The relationship between India and Pakistan is also partially thawing and such improvements may have provided fuel for the resentment of militant groups. A statement telephoned to the local

newspapers suggested it “was meant as a rebuff to the claims of Indian security groups” that militant fighters had been wiped out by military crackdowns and the South Asian earthquake on October 8. Despite the attacks an unprecedented agreement was reached after the bombs to open the Line of Control in Kashmir.

Indian police raided dozens of hotels and detained 20 suspects last night in the hunt for those responsible. A state of emergency has now been declared across the country in reaction to the bombings. Police offered a reward of \$2,400 for information leading to the arrest of those responsible.

Major Indian Attacks in recent years

Delhi, Oct 2005: More than 60 die in three explosions in busy markets

Delhi, May 2005: One killed and 49 injured in blasts in two cinemas

Mumbai, Aug 2003: 52 killed in twin bomb attacks in the financial capital

Delhi, December 2001: 14 die, five of them gunmen, in militant raid on parliament

Mumbai, May 1993: More than 250 die in a series of bomb blasts.