

## **Delhi Blasts, Terror Networks and India's Internal Security**

*Sanjay K Jha*

A series of bomb blasts in Delhi on October 29, 2005, that left 66 dead and 220 injured has, once again, underlined the acute vulnerability of major Indian cities to international terrorism. The blasts in Sarojini Nagar, Paharganj and a Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) bus in Govindpuri were well-orchestrated, nearly simultaneous, and targeted crowded markets and city centres. Though investigations are still on, the arrests made so far and the past trend in terrorism and subversion in Delhi has brought to the fore that the terrorists involved had extensive external linkage to groups based in Pakistan. That raises a question on the Indo-Pakistan peace process and the threat posed by the larger agenda of terrorist groups based in Pakistan.

### **Terror and Subversion in Delhi**

Past trends in terrorist violence suggest that Delhi has always been vulnerable to attacks. According to one estimate, there have been at least 25 cases of bomb blasts in Delhi since 1997.<sup>1</sup> Earlier, on May 22, 2005, one person was killed and 60 injured in two explosions at two cinema halls in Delhi. In addition, a large number of arrests, encounters and seizures point to the fact that the law enforcement agencies have neutralised numerous attempts by terrorist groups to target cities in the last few years. For example, in 2005 alone, there have been dozens of encounters, seizures and arrests, in and around Delhi, of terrorists belonging to Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM), Al Umar, Jaish-e-Mohammed as well as Khalistani groups, particularly the Babbar Khalsa Internatinoal (BKI)—each of which operates from Pakistan.

On January 3, 2005, a BKI terrorist, wanted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for various crimes in the US, was arrested by the Delhi

---

*Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 29, No. 4, Oct-Dec 2005

© Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

police. On January 16, 2005, a Pakistan-trained terrorist of the HM was arrested from Karol Bagh area. On March 3, 2005, two LeT terrorists were arrested with 10 kg of RDX. On March 5, 2005, three LeT terrorists were killed during an encounter at Kakrola Mor in South-West Delhi. A huge quantity of ammunition, including AK-56 assault rifles and hand grenades were recovered from the encounter site. On April 25, 2005, police killed two LeT terrorist near Pragati Maidan and recovered two kg of RDX, four electronic detonator, AK-56 rifle and two pistols. On May 30, 2005, two BKI terrorists were arrested in connection with the May 22-bomb blast at two cinema halls in Delhi. On June 1, 2005, police seized one kg of RDX, a timer, detonator, a .303 rifle, 20 rounds of ammunition and fake driving licenses from a BKI hideout at Inderpuri area, Delhi. On July 1, 2005, Delhi police arrested four terrorists and recovered four Chinese pistols, its 18 cartridges, 35 cartridges of AK-47 rifle, one hand grenade and Rupees 50,000 fake currency. On June 8, 2005, Jagtar Singh Hawara, 'operations chief' of the BKI in India was arrested along with two other accused in the May 22 blasts from the GT Karnal Road in Narela industrial Area of Delhi. On July 14, 2005, two BKI terrorists were arrested by the Delhi police from the Old Delhi railway station in connection with the May 22 blasts. On July 12, 2005, the Delhi police arrested a Pakistan-trained HM terrorist from the New Delhi railway station. On August 23, 2005, Delhi police arrested a senior LeT terrorist from Zakir Nagar in southern part of the city. On October 4, 2005, Police arrested a terrorist of the HM and seized Rupees 10 lakhs from him near the Golcha Cinema in the Daryaganj area of Delhi.

### **Terror Networks and New Terrorists**

Investigations on the October 29, 2005 bomb blasts so far indicate that the serial blasts were engineered by the LeT, though it initially denied its involvement. According to the Delhi police commissioner, a Pakistani national and LeT commander of the Srinagar, Abu Huzefa and J&K militant Abu Al Qama and a small team of seven persons were behind the October 29 blasts.<sup>2</sup> Hufeza, in-charge of LeT operations in Srinagar, is a proclaimed offender in the Akshardham Temple attack case of 2002 in Ahmedabad. So far, the Delhi police have made four arrests. Tariq Ahmed Dar was arrested on November 10, and his interrogation led the police to one of the bombers, Mohammad Rafiq Shah and two others, Mohammed Hussain Fazli and Ghulam Mohammed Khan. Interrogation of Dar also

revealed that he was the main coordinator and facilitator of the blasts. According to media reports, Rafiq Shah may be the first breed of Kashmiri Indians trained in suicide bombings.<sup>3</sup>

Though it would be premature, at this juncture, to establish any definite pattern, the arrests made so far indicate some trend about increasing involvement of educated and financially well off persons in terrorist networks. For example, Dar is married and has a 17 month-old daughter, a house in Srinagar and a stable job with a Delhi-based multinational. Dar was arrested when police recovered a grenade and Rupees 8.5 lakhs in Saudi riyals. He had also been involved as an over-ground worker with militants where his job was to motivate and recruit people.<sup>4</sup> In addition, a number of overground business entities are reportedly involved in this terror network. According to the Delhi police, a Kashmiri shawl merchant in Delhi, Mohammad Hanif Bhat, is suspected to have drawn maps of the blast sites and possible escape routes for the bombers.<sup>5</sup> Police suspect that Bhat along with two other men formed a module of the LeT.

Another significant trend thrown up by investigations has been that instead of *hawala*, the October 29 conspirators also used legal channel to transfer funds. Dar had allegedly used Khan's bank accounts to receive funds through *hawala* and other channels.<sup>6</sup> In the last three months, Rupees 68 lakh passed through the account, way beyond Khan's means. Some of the funds reportedly came from a West Asian country.<sup>7</sup> This only proves that Pakistan-based terrorist groups have been able to create a support structure among Kashmiri extremists' sympathisers who provide assistance to hardcore terrorists. In the past, terrorist acts such as the December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament were the handiwork of Pakistani militants who were provided local support by contacts. However, in the 29/10 case, due to the international pressure on Pakistan to dismantle its terrorist infrastructure, a new brand of terrorists were in the frontlines and were provided with logistical support from Pakistan-based groups. In all these cases, large transactions of money were involved and served as the motivating factor for the local support system.

### **Pakistan-based groups: Pan-Indian Agenda**

Attempts by Pakistan-based extremist groups to create terrorist networks in different parts of India is not new. An important strategy has been to provoke communal confrontation and intensify recruitment drive

in areas dominated by Muslim population across India. Evidence suggests that these groups have exploited incidents such as the Demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 or the communal riots in Gujarat in 2002. After the Gujarat riots, the LeT has been publicly calling on Indian Muslims to join its jihad.<sup>8</sup> Though these Pakistani organisations have not been able to mobilise Indian Muslims on a large scale, they have succeeded in creating a number of support structures with local operators.

The LeT has been on the forefront of such extremist mobilisation. Though the group is proscribed in Pakistan, its overground apparatus, fund-raising activities, recruitment drive and military training of cadres continue to function with impunity. A number of senior leaders associated with this group such as Hafiz Mohammed Saeed continue to operate freely in Pakistan. Jamat-ud-Daawa, the parent organisation of the LeT is actively involved in Pakistan occupied Kashmir in relief efforts in Pakistani Occupied Kashmir.<sup>9</sup> A number of reports have pointed out that the group continues to enjoy the protection and patronage of the Pakistani state, especially the ISI.

Even a cursory glance at the activities of the LeT suggests that its goal is not limited to Jammu and Kashmir but aims at the expansion of Islamist extremism in a wide segment across Asia, especially India. On a number of occasions in the past LeT's Hafiz Mohammad Saeed has declared that Kashmir was the 'gateway to capture India' and that it was the aim of the group to campaign for secession of Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh) and Junagarh (Gujarat) that have significant Muslim population. With an objective to create a caliphate, the LeT asserts that jihad must continue until Islam, as a way of life, dominates the whole world and Allah's law is universally enforced. Not surprisingly, some LeT cadres have operated in Iraq and the UK; cells have also been detected in the US. Investigations into the July 2005 bombings in London revealed that terrorists involved in the bombing had visited LeT facilities in Pakistan.

Expansion of extremist Islamist agenda beyond Jammu and Kashmir fits into Pakistan's larger strategy of destabilising India. No wonder, the Pakistan-based terrorist groups have long characterised the ongoing peace process between India and Pakistan as a sell out. In September 2005, the LeT-affiliated magazine *Ghazwa* advocated an escalation of jihad in Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>10</sup> If this continues under the full glare of Pakistani authorities, it raises several questions about their intention and the future of the peace

process. The critical question in this regard is whether President Musharraf has enough support within the military to act against these groups or whether such activities will continue to be part of Pakistan's broad orientation towards India? American compulsions have encouraged Pakistan to make a distinction between groups operating in Afghanistan and those active in Jammu and Kashmir and at the same time keep the option of negotiation open. Though India has had some success in pushing Musharraf to contain cross-border terrorism, much remains to be done. The core question, therefore, remains that whether Pakistani state is willing to go further in dismantling terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan. Only a sustained pressure from all sides—India, the international community and the expanding peace constituency within Pakistan—can force the Pakistani state to change its strategic orientation towards India.

As far as India's preparedness of this kind of threat is concerned, the October 29 blasts as well as the past trends demonstrate the capabilities of terrorist groups to strike hard. Given the spread of their network, technologies and recruits available and their deep links with the Pakistani establishment, such groups would continue to pose a major threat to India's internal security irrespective of the ongoing peace process between India and Pakistan. This emphasises the need to evolve a comprehensive approach to deal with such threats. One of the crucial elements of such an approach should be to understand the dynamics of support network and factors such as ideological motivation, financial inducements and various overground, at times, legal entities that form parts of such network. There is also a need to review the response mechanism of security forces including their skill, attitude, preparedness and coordination with other relevant agencies. The police force in particular needs to undergo significant modernisation if it is to cope with the challenge of local and international terrorism.

### References/ End Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Ajai Sahni, "Shadow over the Festival of Lights", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, vol. 4, no. 16, October 31, 2005, at [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/4\\_16.htm#assessment1](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/4_16.htm#assessment1)
- <sup>2</sup> Aman Sharma, "Delhi bombers foreign, funds from W Asia: Cops", at [http://indianexpress.com/full\\_story.php?content\\_id=81925](http://indianexpress.com/full_story.php?content_id=81925)
- <sup>3</sup> "Our homegrown suicide bombers", *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi: December 11, 2005.

- <sup>4</sup> "Delhi blasts: Lashkar 'link' is MNC executive", at [http://indianexpress.com/full\\_story.php?content\\_id=81874](http://indianexpress.com/full_story.php?content_id=81874)
- <sup>5</sup> "Shawl merchant drew maps for Delhi bombers", at <http://cities.expressindia.com/fullstory.php?newsid=157521>
- <sup>6</sup> [http://outlookindia.com/pti\\_news.asp?id=340184](http://outlookindia.com/pti_news.asp?id=340184)
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Praveen Swami, "Lashkar fishes in troubled waters", at <http://www.hindu.com/2004/06/27/stories/2004062705880100.htm>
- <sup>9</sup> Kanchan Lakshman, "Jihad After the Quake", *South Asia Intelligence Review*, vol. 4, no. 15, October 24, 2005, at [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/4\\_15.htm#assessment1](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/4_15.htm#assessment1)
- <sup>10</sup> "Carnage and Consequences" at <http://www.hindu.com/2005/11/01/stories/2005110104201000.htm>

Sanjay K Jha was Associate Fellow at IDSA from 2002 to 2005.