

Terrorist attack in Mumbai kills 21

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At least 21 people were killed and more than 140 injured yesterday by a coordinated bomb attack at three different locations in Mumbai, India's largest city and financial center.

The bombs appear to have been set with the aim of causing maximum casualties. They targeted three well-frequented areas in the center of the city and exploded within twelve minutes of each other during the evening rush-hour.

The first and deadliest blast rocked the Zaveri bazaar, a jewelry market, shortly before 7PM. A minute later, a second bomb exploded in the Opera House business district, a center of Mumbai's diamond-export trade. The third bomb was reportedly planted in a taxi in Dadar, a residential neighbourhood in central Mumbai whose railway station is a major commuter hub.

Yesterday's coordinated attack immediately prompted comparisons with the commando-style raid mounted on two high-end hotels, a train station, and a Jewish community center in south (downtown) Mumbai in late November 2008. That raid, which was only silenced after 60 hours of mayhem, resulted in 166 deaths and led to a major crisis in the always fractious relations between Indian and Pakistan. Pointing to evidence that showed the attackers traveled to Mumbai from Pakistan and were in telephone communication with people in Pakistan during the attack, New Delhi blamed the attack on Islamabad's failure to suppress anti-Indian Islamacist militias in Pakistan and said it would hold the Pakistani government to account.

This included repeated threats from Indian Home Minister P. Chidambaram and other Indian officials that, in the event of a similar, Pakistan-based terrorist attack, India would be prepared to mount cross-border strikes on "terrorist bases" in Pakistan.

Yesterday's coordinated bomb blasts appear to have been far less sophisticated than the November 2008

raid.

In response to the bombings, the Indian government placed security forces on high alert in major cities across the country, while Prime Minister Manmohan Singh issued an appeal for calm. In the past, Mumbai has been the site of widespread communal violence, most significantly when activists from Shiv Sena and other Hindu communalists targeted Mumbai's Muslims in the weeks following the Hindu right's December 1992 razing of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in Ayodhya.

Home Minister Chidambaram convened a meeting of the country's top domestic security officials Wednesday evening that was joined for a time by Prime Minister Singh. Later Chidambaram flew to Mumbai to visit the bomb sites.

Predictably, spokesmen for the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Official Opposition in India's parliament, have sought to exploit yesterday's tragedy, holding it up as proof that the Congress Party-led central government is incapable of defending India from terrorism. Without so much as a speck of evidence, Narendra Modi, the BJP Chief Minister of Gujarat and one of the instigators of the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, said yesterday's bombings might be a "dress rehearsal" for a much larger attack.

The Pakistani government, which only recently persuaded India to resume a full-dialogue on their territorial, military, water-management and other bilateral disputes, was quick to issue a statement condemning Mumbai's latest terrorist episode.

No group has claimed responsibility for yesterday's coordinated bombings. Whatever the professed aims of the perpetrators, the wanton slaughter of ordinary people can only strengthen reaction, providing fresh pretexts for building up the repressive apparatus of the state and helping poison relations between Hindus and Muslims in India and between the peoples of India and Pakistan.

In an article posted on its website Wednesday night, the *Hindu* claimed that “Sources in the intelligence set up were inclined to believe that IEDs [Incendiary Explosive Decisives], used in the blast, appeared to be handiwork of Indian Mujahideen [an Indian-based Islamacist terrorist group] working closely with [the Pakistan-based] Lashkar-e-Toiba terrorist outfit.” But other press reports said there is as of yet no indication as to who orchestrated the attack, and that it could well have been mounted by one of Mumbai’s crime bosses.

The Indian government has blamed the November 2008 terrorist atrocity in Mumbai on Lashkar-e-Toiba, an Islamacist group which long enjoyed the patronage of sections of Pakistan’s intelligence-security apparatus, and there is indeed evidence implicating Lashkar-e-Toiba in that attack.

But India’s elite—which has been locked in a reactionary geo-political conflict with Pakistan since the 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent—is no less politically responsible than its Pakistani counterpart for the explosive inter-state rivalry that threatens the people of South Asia with a nuclear conflagration. Over the past decade, New Delhi has been eagerly pursuing a strategic alliance with US imperialism, competing with Pakistan as to who can be Washington’s best ally in the Afghan War, and securing a special civilian nuclear deal with the US government that will allow India to concentrate its indigenous nuclear program on weapons development.

Moreover, the Indian ruling class eagerly seized on the 2008 Mumbai attack to aggressively advance its own predatory interests.

For an Indian government determined to rebuff suggestions from the incoming Obama administration that it would attempt to persuade Pakistan to intensify its military support for the Afghan War by leaning on New Delhi to make concessions to Islamabad over Kashmir, the Mumbai attack was a godsend. The Indian government proclaimed Pakistan a “terrorist state” and the “epicenter of world terrorism and suspended its “composite peace dialogue” with Islamabad, while privately telling Washington that any US intervention in the Kashmir dispute would threaten Indo-US relations.

With the connivance of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government and India’s corporate media, the BJP and Hindu right, meanwhile,

successfully used the November 2008 Mumbai attack to divert attention away from the recent exposure of a Hindu terrorist network with connections to both the BJP and its sister organizations and to India’s military. It is now known that this network was responsible for a series of lethal bombings that police and government authorities long blamed on Muslim extremists.

Yesterday’s bombings come at a time when both the Pakistani and Indian governments are beset by crises—crises sections of their respective elites may well seek to manage by whipping up chauvinism against their arch rival.

Both countries face mounting economic problems and social unrest, particularly over soaring food prices. In Pakistan’s case this is compounded by a crisis in its strategic partnership with the US. Last week Washington announced that it is withholding \$800 million in military aid from Pakistan, because of the steps Islamabad took to limit the US military-intelligence presence in the country following the illegal and unilateral Abbottabad raid to kill Osama bin Laden.



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