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Mumbai Inquiry Focuses on Militants

By AMELIA GENTLEMAN

NEW DELHI, July 12 — Senior police officials investigating Tuesday's murderous attacks on Mumbai's rail system said today that they were focusing on a Kashmiri militant group, Lashkar-e-Toiba, which has denied involvement in the attacks.

Meanwhile, Mumbai, India's financial capital, made a determined effort to return to business in the wake of the carnage. At least 183 people are now believed to have died in the attacks, and more than 700 people were injured.

Service resumed early today on the rail network that was struck during the evening rush hour on Tuesday. Though the trains were not as crowded as usual, many commuters overcame their fears sufficiently to ride them again.

Police spent the day combing through the wreckage of the seven passenger cars that were bombed, looking for forensic evidence that might help them identify the culprits. Experts were examining a timer found near the site of one of the blasts. Initial tests suggested that RDX, a powerful plastic explosive, had been used, the home ministry said.

The director general of police in Maharashtra, the Indian state that includes Mumbai, said that officers had "no concrete evidence" to implicate Lashkar-e-Toiba, an Islamic militant organization that is fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, a mostly Muslim state that is also claimed, and is partly occupied, by Pakistan.

But the director general, P. S. Pasricha, said "the modus operandi does suggest their involvement." The organization and scale of the attacks, the type of explosive involved and the use of remote control devices all suggested that Lashkar-e-Toiba may have been involved, perhaps in conjunction with local groups, he said.

"Still, it would be premature and misleading to say anything about their involvement at this point of investigations as forensic lab reports are awaited," he added.

Officials in Delhi were speaking even more cautiously. Rajneesh Kumar, the deputy director of communications at the Ministry of Home Affairs, said it was too early to comment on who might have set off the bombs.

"Initially, we were focusing on the relief and rescue operation, but now the investigation is under way," he said in a telephone interview.

Asked to comment on widespread speculation that Kashmiri militants were involved, he said: "It would be very premature to go into which leads we are currently pursuing. The security agencies are looking into who might be behind this, but discussing the

involvement of one particular group or another would at this stage be a very speculative exercise.”

Representatives from Lashkar-e-Toiba, whose name means Army of the Pure, telephoned several Indian news organizations to deny involvement. “These are inhuman and barbaric acts” a man who identified himself as “Doctor Ghaznavi”, a spokesman for the group, told Reuters. “Islam does not permit the killing of innocent people.”

In the past, the group has been implicated in attacks on Indian government facilities and security forces, and in the roundup and massacre of non-Muslim civilians in Kashmiri villages, and it has reportedly claimed to have links with Al Qaeda and with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

A senior official at the Foreign Ministry, Anand Sharma, said that the bombings in Mumbai on Tuesday were aimed at “wrecking” the peace process between Pakistan and India, both of which have nuclear weapons. He said that New Delhi remained committed to improving relations with Islamabad.

Analysts warned that if a link is established between the bombings and the Kashmir dispute, it could set back the peace process.

Investigators are trying to assemble a clear picture of how the explosives were planted and detonated. Local investigators told reporters that they thought most of the bombs were placed in overhead luggage racks. That is consistent with reports from the city’s hospitals saying that many victims suffered head and chest injuries, probably caused by blasts above them.

The police in Mumbai, formerly called Bombay, are working without the aid of video surveillance footage, which helped British police identify suspects after the attacks in the London Underground on July 7, 2005. Police were compiling sketches of several individuals who were said by fellow passengers to have behaved strangely just before the seven explosions, which went off within minutes of one another.

After a fraught rescue operation hampered by monsoon rains, congested traffic and a citywide atmosphere of panic, hospital officials are still struggling to identify all the dead and wounded.

Sonia Gandhi, leader of the Indian National Congress, the chief political party in the country’s ruling coalition, traveled to Mumbai late Tuesday and condemned the attacks as “inhuman.” After calling for a nationwide review of security measures, the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, remained in Delhi today for scheduled meetings, but was expected to travel to the scene of the attacks later in the week.

Political recriminations over intelligence failures began just hours after the blasts. The leader of the opposition, L. K. Advani, said during a tour of Mumbai hospitals that “lax

policies” were responsible for the security failure. The home minister, Shivraj Patil, had said earlier that authorities had had received hints that an attack was coming but had been unable to prevent it.

The fact that the targets were first-class cars on Mumbai’s commuter trains suggested that the bombings were meant to kill and injure people “who represented the face of globalizing Mumbai,” the Hindustan Times said.

Many of those people said they were making a show of defiance by returning to work today.

“They can’t scare us this way,” Brijesh Ojha told The Associated Press. “Life has to go on. People have seen such attacks before, but Bombay has a knack of bouncing back.”

Ashok K. Mehta, a retired army general who is now an independent security analyst, said that terror attacks as sophisticated as the train bombings were unprecedented in India. “This was nothing like the bombs which hit shopping markets in Delhi in October,” he said. “There, you just had a bomb on a bicycle.

What we saw in Mumbai was in a different class entirely.

“It was a brilliant piece of precise, military organization, which required the involvement of six or seven different terrorist cells, able to coordinate attacks within minutes of each other. I think this indicates a group connected with Al Qaeda, probably Lashkar-e-Toiba. We have never seen anything like this in India before.”

He added that in statements published in the wake of President George Bush’s visit to Delhi this February, Al Qaeda began to include India on its list of enemy nations.

The denial of responsibility by Lashkar-e-Toiba was routine and meaningless, he said: “The group never accepts responsibility.”

A military security analyst, K. Subrahmanyam, said he saw similarities with the London and Madrid attacks in the way the Mumbai bombings were planned. “This was an attack on India’s economy, designed to dissipate foreign investment,” he said. “It was also an attack on the country’s middle classes.”

Indian security services lack the surveillance technology that would make it possible to monitor terrorist cells as they planned attacks, he said: “We need to be better equipped.”

K. P. S. Gill, a former chief of police in Punjab and an expert on terrorist groups in India, said he thought it was no coincidence that the attacks in Mumbai were preceded by a wave of explosions in Kashmir. “The two events are likely to be linked,” he said. “I believe that this is the working of L-e-T, working under the umbrella of Al Qaeda.”

Without video surveillance, he said, the police will have to rely on informants and interrogation of suspects to crack the case.

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