

Did the bombers target India's upper-class?



HARUN UR RASHID

ON July 12, Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India's financial capital, was severely rocked by bomb blasts in seven separate trains, taking toll of at least 183 with another 663 injured.

The leaders across the world including those from US, Britain, Pakistan and Bangladesh condemned the senseless attacks on civilians. The Secretary General of the UN called it an attack on humanity and its fundamental values. Latest reports indicate that Pakistan is willing to cooperate in the investigations with India's security forces.

Why target first-class compartments?

The bombs went off within minutes of each other along the Western Railway line, connecting the historical commercial districts of southern Mumbai to the spreading suburbs in the north. Six million passengers ride the trains in Mumbai city every day. It is a soft target and the bombers selected them.

The bombers seem to be targeting passengers who were leaving office for home. The bombs went off during the peak hour at 6:30 in the evening. It was a calculated timing to cause huge loss of human life.

The bombers attempted to disrupt the frenzied rhythm of daily life in Mumbai, the financial and film capital, populated by 14 million people. It is a port from where exports and imports are conducted.

Large industrial companies, such as Reliance, Tata and a raft of state-owned firms like Air India and State Bank of India have headquarters in the city.

Analysts believe that two facts come out from the bomb blasts: (a) all seven first-class compartments in seven separate trains were targeted, and (b) the train system, the life line of the city, was attempted to be crippled.

The bombers, observers say, deliberately targeted first-class compartments and the victims were overwhelming male and were of working age. Most of them reportedly were habitual first-class passengers.

Ronak Gandhi (21) reportedly said that "they wanted upper class people to suffer this time." His brother Chintan (25), lay inside Lilavati Hospital, with a broken arm and internal bleeding.

It has been argued that the bombers this time aimed at individuals who drive the unprecedented growth of the economy in the country. The dead people include bankers, office executives, stock brokers, diamond merchants, engineers and computer specialists. That means all the upper class people seem to be targeted so as to hurt economy.

According to Morgan Chase in Singapore, "the blasts will have a few medium and long-term economic implications," while India's finance minister was quoted as saying that the terrorist attacks would have no impact on the economy.

India's economy continues to be growing dramatically and has been a cause for envy for many countries. Reports indicate that in India, production in factories, utilities and mines rose 10% per cent from a year earlier following April's revised 9.6% per cent gain, according to the Central Statistical Organisation.

India made more cement and steel in May this year to meet the demand at home, and crude oil output rose for the first time in almost a year. Tata Steel, India's second-biggest steelmaker, has been producing steel to meet the increasing demand and sales rose 28% per cent in the second quarter.

India's \$775 billion economy (three times of Russia's economy) expanded 9.3% per cent from a

year earlier in the quarter ended in March '01, the fastest after China among the world's 20 biggest economies. India aims at 10% per cent economic growth during the next decade to end poverty in the country.

Another view

There is another view of the cause of the blasts. Some observers believe that the bomb blasts were targeted towards people who ordinarily have a voice and influence in the decision-making of the government. The militants think that the business and entrepreneur classes are targeted, they might be aware that there exist serious political/social problems within India's society that need to be resolved. The government cannot be impervious to resolving the divisive issues for ever.

They also argue that terrorist acts, although cowardly, totally unjustifiable and unacceptable, do not occur for nothing. However wrong or mad their motive is, they exist and constitute a reality and one should seriously look into causes for terrorist attacks. For example, why does New Zealand or Canada not become the target of terrorists? But Madrid and London did.

How did Mumbai react?

Reports suggest that Mumbai people are defiant. Amazingly it was business as usual in the city the next day. Schools were open. Trains were running and Mumbai people took the day as if nothing could dampen their spirits. Some say that the crisis of the city is to turn into opportunity.

The car parks are full, traffic flowed normally and the pavement vendors sold an assortment of goods such as shirts, footwear and fruits. Banks reportedly did normal business.

The Mumbai Stock Exchange rebounded and rose 315 points and the Sensex was buoyed by the superior quarterly results of the outsourcing firm Infosys Technologies and Infosys shares climbed as much as 3386.45 rupees.

One Bank Manager stated that:

"We are grieving on the inside but outwardly it is business as usual." Mumbai will not bow down to the terrorists. The defiant spirit that dominated Londoners last year had been visible in the minds people of Mumbai.

Who are responsible?

Police officials in Mumbai were attempting to build a clear picture of how explosives were planted and denoted. Local investigators told reporters that they suspected that most of the bombs were placed in the overhead luggage racks of the first-class compartments. The police were compiling sketches of several individuals described by fellow passengers as behaving strangely just before the explosions. But one fact seems to be certain that it was a smooth and highly sophisticated job. Some suspect that a "big country" seems to be behind the blasts.

A defence analyst K. Subrahmanyan reportedly said he saw similarities with the London and Madrid attacks in terms of the way it was planned. KPS Gill, a former chief of police in the Punjab and an expert on terrorist groups in India, said that he thought it was no coincidence that the attacks in Mumbai were preceded by a wave of blasts in Indian part of Kashmir. He reportedly accused *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, working under the umbrella of Al Qaeda.

Although terrorism is to be condemned by all accounts, no definition has been worked out as yet by the UN because one man's freedom fighters are another man's terrorists. Even Saarc failed to do so definitively. Some say that we have to live with terrorism as we live with endemic poverty. It will take a long time to get rid of terrorism. Terrorism is a symptom of a deeper ideological battle. Furthermore, terrorism has become embroiled with political issues and that is the problem.

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The hand that feeds the fire



CHRISTOPHER DICKEY, KEVIN PERAINO AND BABAK DEHGHANPISHEH

THE cool rage of Hasan Nasrallah crackled over the telephone line to a Beirut television station. Israeli jets had just tried to kill him from the air, destroying his home and office. "You wanted an open war, and we are ready for an open war," the Hizbullah leader warned. His missile-armed militia would reach deep into Israel. "Our homes will not be the only ones to be destroyed, our children will not be the only ones to die," he vowed. "You wanted to change the rules of the game? You don't know who you're fighting."

He had a point. Israel's nearby enemy was clear enough. The crisis began in Gaza on June 25, when a corporal in the Israeli Army was taken hostage by Hamas guerrillas. Then it exploded across the region last week after Hizbullah guerrillas crossed into Israel to snatch two more soldiers, killing eight. Israel's reaction was swift, brutal and massive. Its forces took the whole of Lebanon hostage, treating the state on its northern border just as it treated the Palestinian territory to its south, tearing apart highways, blockading ports, blowing up the runways and fuel dumps at Beirut's international airport -- setting out not only to free the hostages but to eliminate Hizbullah once and for all. Yes, this was war. Nasrallah was right about that.

But battles -- and battle lines -- are rarely if ever simple in the Middle East. Nasrallah knows that. So do the Israelis, who saw hidden hands behind the Lebanese and Palestinian militants. They accused Syria, which harbors the Hamas leadership in exile and has a long-standing alliance with Hizbullah in Lebanon, of complicity. But they also saw the long arm of their ultimate enemy, Iran -- the creator of Hizbullah, a patron of Hamas, the ally of Syria, the provider of rockets that struck 22 miles deep into Israel last week and a missile that crippled an Israeli warship. Iran, developer of nuclear technology and eventually, perhaps, nuclear weapons.

In an exclusive interview with Newsweek's Richard Wolfe, President George W Bush said he thinks those suspicions are legitimate: "There's a lot of people who believe that the Iranians are trying to exert more and more influence over the entire region and the use of Hizbullah is to create more chaos to advance their strategy." He called that "a theory that's got some legs to it as far as I'm concerned."

One aim of "those who perpetuate violence," said Bush, would be to disrupt the international consensus against Iran's nuclear-enrichment program. Hizbullah launched its attack on Israel the same day that foreign ministers from the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany agreed to push ahead with demands that Iran suspend its nuclear efforts. The second part of the Iranian strategy, Bush suggested, would be to "create conditions such that moderate governments tend to step back in fear, and the vacuum would then be filled by the proponents of an aggressive ideology."

For more than 50 years, the Middle East's wars have been the world's wars. Greater powers have used lesser ones as proxies, and battles between large states have been fought out in smaller ones -- often in weak, divided Lebanon. But skirmishes can turn quickly to conflagrations, and calibrated violence can escalate suddenly into atrocity with unpredictable and enduring consequences. As fighting raged last week, global shocks were quick in coming. Oil prices soared to record highs -- above \$78 a barrel -- and the troubled skies over Beirut filled with thunderous echoes of the bloody past: massive Israeli assaults on southern Lebanon in 1978 and 1996, and the full-scale invasion of 1982 that sucked the United States into a nightmare of truck-bombings and hostage-takings.

Bush's decision to invade Iraq as part of the "global war on terror" made America a party to the conflicts on the ground as never before. Saddam Hussein's regime, loathsome as it was, provided a strategic balance to the power of a radicalized Iran. Now the invasion has put Washington head-to-head with Tehran. The confrontation is military, economic, political, ideological, direct and indirect, overt



and covert -- and on several fronts the Iranians appear to have outmaneuvered the administration. Prominent Iranian journalist Mashallah Shamsolvaezin, who is also an expert on Lebanese affairs, suggests that Tehran's next step, far from making war, will be to present itself as a peacemaker. "This will present another opportunity to show its regional power," he said.

At the foreign ministers' meeting in Paris recently, there was general consternation at the Iranian-backed violence on the ground in the Middle East. "But what can we do?" one senior European diplomat asked. "It's all part of the same problem (with Iran), but we cannot tackle it all 'cosmologically.' We have to take it on piece by piece." Each set of players linked to Iran has its own interests, and the Tehran regime itself seems seriously divided. The Iranian challenge is not a Gordian knot that can be sliced through in one bold stroke. It's a bag full of knots, each of which has to be untied and, if possible, untangled from the rest.

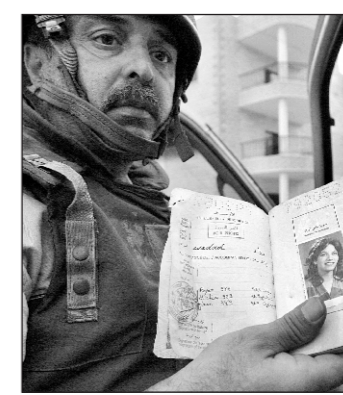
Hizbullah: Iran created the Shiite Lebanese militia Hizbullah -- the "Party of God" -- after Israeli troops stormed into Beirut in 1982. Initially trained by Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the group continues to receive extensive funding and weapons from Tehran, including the arsenal of more than 13,000 short- and medium-range rockets and missiles now being used to attack Israel. According to terrorism analyst Magnus Ranstorp, an expert on Hizbullah who is now at the Swedish National Defence College, Hizbullah's decision-making council normally includes two Iranians. "Hizbullah is not a Lebanese organization, it's a proxy for Iran," says Ephraim Sneh, a former Israeli general and Labor Party member of the Knesset. "Nasrallah has never carried out an operation on this scale without his masters."

On Friday Nasrallah gleefully announced that his group had hit an Israeli warship off the coast of Lebanon. The vessel was badly damaged by the radar-guided weapon, identified by the Israelis as a C-802 antiship missile assembled in Iran. "There are very clear fingerprints of Iranian involvement," Brig. Gen. Ido Nehushtan told Newsweek. Even so, the officer admitted, "whether it was operated by Iran, I can't confirm." Other senior Israelis were less cautious in their claims. Former Mossad director Danny Yatom says Iranians have been launching Hizbullah's longer-range rockets, like the ones that hit the Israeli port city of Haifa last week. "The finger that pulled the trigger was an Iranian finger," he declares -- although US and British intelligence sources say they doubt it.

In a broader sense, nothing Nasrallah does could be accomplished without Iranian backing, but he has also become a power in his own right. Last year, after Syrian troops were forced to withdraw from Lebanon by international pressure and massive street protests, Nasrallah's strength actually increased. The same UN Security Council Resolution 1559 that required the Syrian pullout also called for the disarming of militias. Hizbullah refused, and there was no force in the country strong enough to take it on. "Today, Nasrallah is the dictator of Lebanon," says Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres. "He has his own army. He doesn't ask anybody what to do, least of all the Lebanese government."

Nevertheless, Israel says the massive destruction of vital Lebanese infrastructure is intended to show Lebanon's people the price they will pay for Nasrallah's decision to instigate a war. "You know that we are doing the right thing, and that if we succeed, Lebanon would be the beneficiary," Israel's UN Ambassador Dan Gillerman told Lebanon's envoy as they appeared before the Security Council recently.

The trouble is, anger against the Israelis is almost certain to grow even faster than against Hizbullah. Many Lebanese owe a great deal to Hizbullah's clinics, schools and other basic social services in the areas it dominates -- underwritten, of course, by hundreds of millions of dollars from Iran. When Israel finally decided to withdraw completely from southern Lebanon in 2000, after relentless pressure from Hizbullah's guerrilla attacks, the organization achieved heroic status not only in Lebanon, but throughout the Muslim world.



Nasrallah, especially, emerged as a charismatic leader, his speeches carried nationwide by Hizbullah's own Al Manar satellite television station.

Part of Nasrallah's mystique is as a man of his word. He vowed to oust Israel from Lebanese land, and he succeeded. But Nasrallah also vowed to free hundreds of captured Lebanese in Israeli jails. In 2004 he ransomed an Israeli businessman for 400 prisoners, but others remained in jail. By late last year Nasrallah was on the prowl again, looking for new captives to use as bargaining chips in another swap. In November the Israelis announced that they'd thwarted an attempt by Hizbullah to take Israeli soldiers as hostages. It should have been no surprise when members of the Hamas military wing in Gaza adopted a similar strategy last month to try to win the release of some of the 10,000 Palestinians in Israeli prisons.

The Palestinians: There's no more potent issue in the Muslim world than the fate of the Holy Land, and Iran has been looking for a piece of that righteous action since the early days of the Khomeini revolution. As if to underscore the point, the unit of Iran's Revolutionary Guards charged with carrying out operations abroad, including terrorism, is called Al Quds -- which is the Arabic name of Jerusalem. Tehran has pledged at least \$50 million to help underwrite the embattled Hamas government elected in January. But it's the clandestine ties that are of most concern to Israel, its neighbors and the United States.

The alliance between Hizbullah and Hamas dates back to 1992, when Israel rounded up hundreds of Hamas activists and dumped them in no man's land, on the Lebanese side of the border. The Beirut government refused to let the militants travel any farther, and they found themselves stranded on barren hillsides that were, in fact, under Hizbullah's control. The two groups have serious religious differences: Hamas follows a militant Sunni strain of Islam, and Hizbullah is Shiite. All the same, Hizbullah offered tents and food to the stranded Palestinians, and the friendship grew from there.

Jordan's security services, fearful that their territory might become a base -- or a target -- for terrorist attacks, have tracked the Iranian connection very closely. Jordanian intelligence sources, declining to be named because of the sensitivity of security issues, recall that by 1997 their government was arresting and interrogating Hamas members who had received, in the words of one veteran security officer, "religious, military, counterinterrogation and even intelligence training in Iran." Hamas leader Khaled Meshal was living in Jordan at the time, and that's where the Israelis tried to assassinate him. When he recovered, he made several trips to Tehran before the Jordanians told him not to come back, in 1999.

Iran's support for the Palestinian militants only continued to grow. After the second intifada against Israel began in 2000, the Israelis intercepted boatloads of arms sent from Iran or through Hizbullah to Palestinian guerrilla groups. The last ship, intercepted in 2003, was a fishing trawler carrying not only munitions and manuals from Lebanon to Gaza, but a Hizbullah bomb-maker as well.

Meshal ended up in Syria, where he remains with a high public profile. Last week he met reporters at the Four Seasons Hotel in the capital. His ties to the Syrian government? "It's clear we have bad relations," he joked. "That's why I'm giving a press conference in Damascus." And his links to Hizbullah? "They are part of the resistance (to Israel), so of course we have contacts."

The Syrians: Posters on walls all over Damascus last week showed President Bashar al-Assad flanked by Nasrallah on one side and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on the other. Syria is the go-between, the vital link between Iran and Hizbullah, as well as between Iran and Palestinian radicals. Assad's father, the dictator Hafez al-Assad, always took care to keep control of the troublesome proxies he used against Israel. In 1987, when members of Hizbullah grew so cocky that they started humiliating Syrian troops at checkpoints in Beirut, Assad had several of them lined up in their barracks and shot. But Bashar is much weaker, and much more



dependent on Iran -- virtually his only ally. Last month Damascus and Tehran signed a military agreement to establish "a joint front against Israel." The pact includes a commitment promising unrestricted passage through Syria for Iranian arms shipments to Hizbullah.

The Iraqis: Tehran scarcely needs Syrian help to infiltrate Iraq. Iran's influence is pervasive there already. The Baghdad press reported last week that the Iranians had allocated \$1 billion to develop Iraq's telecommunications industry and integrate the two countries' systems. Iran sponsors book fairs, supports the pilgrimage of millions of Iraqis to Shiite holy places in Iraq and provides transportation for Iraqi pilgrims going the other way to shrines in Iran.

Iran also exerts a much more sinister presence. Residents of Basra report that members of the Iranian intelligence service operate openly in their city's streets. Iranian agents are said to have infiltrated the militias, the political parties and the Iraqi security services. US officials believe that Iran gave Iraqi insurgents know-how to build the shaped-charge IEDs that have been so effective in attacking Coalition forces -- a technique perfected by Hizbullah guerrillas against the Israelis. Although Iran presents itself as the defender of Shiites in Iraq's worsening sectarian warfare, it has also had at least a passing relationship with al Qaeda terrorists who have made every effort to instigate a blood feud between Sunnis and Shiites. The late, unlamented Abu Musab al-Zarqawi initially made his way from Afghanistan to Iraq in 2001 through Iranian territory, and some intelligence reports suggest a more extensive relationship with Iran, at least in the early days of his terrorist career.

Iran's clerics have deep ideological differences with the nettlesome Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr. Even so, Tehran supports him and his Mahdi Army militia, which has repeatedly been linked to ferocious death-squad killings. "I used to fight for free," a former member of Sadr's forces told Newsweek, "but today the Mahdi Army receives millions of dollars every month from Iran in exchange for carrying out the program: assassinations of prominent Sunnis and former Iraqi military officers who fought against Iran in the 1980-88 war. The United States would not like to confront, again, the kind of simultaneous Sunni and Shiite insurrections it faced in 2004, but tensions are fierce. "The government is unable to do anything to control the Mahdi Army," says Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Baghdadi, a well-connected figure in the Shiite holy city of Najaf. "This Army is a bomb set to go off in the near future."

The Iranians: When Tehran's chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Larjani, met recently with the European Union's Javier Solana and delegates from Britain, France, Germany and Russia, they expected he'd make some counter-offer to their proposed package of incentives for Iran to stop its nuclear-enrichment program. But no. "If he'd come with a partial response, we could have kept on," said one of the Europeans in the room, who asked not to be identified because of the confidentiality of the discussion. "But he came with no response. Instead, he kept saying that all this was entirely about 'regime change,' so why talk at all?"

European and American officials were surprised by the obstinacy, but also intrigued. Larjani arrived in Brussels with what one described as a "huge" delegation, suggesting the various members were keeping an eye on each other. "It could be that they have not made up their minds," said the official.

Perhaps. Iranian bloggers and other commentators suggest the regime is badly divided over Ahmadinejad's radical rhetoric, and the risks he is running in the confrontation over nuclear arms. Nevertheless, as soon as the fruitless talks in Brussels had adjourned, the delegation went straight to Damascus. And the next day, Nasrallah started his war.

With Richard Wolfe in Saint Petersburg, Joanna Chen and Dan Ephron in Jerusalem, Scott Johnson in Baghdad, and Mark Hosenball and John Barry in Washington.

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From the cradle to the grave



M ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

registrar, of having registered the birth or death.

--The law allows free registration within 2 years from the date of its effectiveness.

--The law has termed the birth certificate as a proof of one's age and identity to provide access to certain services which include passport, marriage registration, admission in educational institutions, employment in government, autonomous and private sectors, driving license, voter list and registration of land.

Let us now see whether some factors may impede the successful implementation of the law.

First, the law has made it mandatory for father or mother or guardian or designated person to give information with respect to a newborn baby within 45 days of birth to the local Registrar. Similarly, with respect to the death of a person, his/her son, daughter, guardian or designated person shall be bound to give the information, within 30 days of death of that person, to the local Registrar. The question that arises is whether, in a country where illiteracy hovers around 50%, the above mentioned persons will be interested in going to the local Registrar to give information in the prescribed manner and within the time limit.

It may be mentioned that the Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 of India provides a list of persons whose duty is to give information to the Registrar to register births and deaths. Under this Act, with respect to births and deaths in a house, the head of the household or, in his absence during the period within which the birth or death has to be reported, the nearest relative of the head present in the house; with respect to births and deaths in a hospital, health centre, maternity or nursing home or other like institution, the medical officer in charge or any person authorised by him in this behalf; with respect to births and deaths in a jail, the jailor in charge; with respect to births and deaths in choultry, chattram, hostel, dharmsala, boarding-house, lodging-house, tavern, barrack, toddy shop or place of public resort the person in charge thereof; with respect to any newborn child or dead body found deserted in a public place, the

head-man or other corresponding officer of the village in the case of a village and the officer in charge of the local police station elsewhere shall be duty-bound to report the births or deaths to the Registrar.

Further, in the United States the Model Law (1907) provided that it was the duty of the physician, midwife, or person acting as midwife, to register the birth. If there was no one acting in this capacity at the birth, then it devolved upon the father or mother of the child, or the householder or owner of the premises where the birth took place to report to the local Registrar the fact of such birth within ten days of its occurrence. Upon being notified of the birth, the local Registrar had the responsibility to issue a birth certificate.

In Bangladesh, unless field level health and family welfare employees are duty-bound to report births and deaths in the houses to the local Registrar; and unless the medical officer in charge or any authorised person in hospitals, clinics and maternity homes are under obligation for reporting births and deaths to the local Registrar; unless the jailor is duty-bound to report births and deaths in a jail to the local Registrar, successful implementation of the law may not be possible.

Secondly, unless the people, especially the 50 percent living below the poverty line, find some immediate benefits in reporting births, they may not co-operate with the law. Matters like passport, driving license, voter list, land registration etc. are of little or no importance to them.

A cursory look into the introduction of birth and death registration in the United States shows that it took government authorities many years to bring all of the United States into the system. Registration of births and deaths is the function of the health department of the state government. The general people supposed, "it is merely a hobby of the doctors, who want the information for their own private purposes, and that this information can only be obtained by an unjustified amount of meddling with private affairs and by a system of espionage which will cause much trouble and difficulty."

Many people had never consid-

ered a birth certificate to be of any importance until old age assistance, unemployment insurance, and other ramifications of the Social Security Act demonstrated to them that it was necessary to have this official proof of their existence.

Thirdly, the law has not specifically made any provision for the Chief Registrar to co-ordinate the activities of the Registrars, although provision has been made for the supervision and inspection of the office of the Registrar by a person authorised by the government. It is not clear how the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives will get coordinated reports, statements, recommendations etc. from a large number of Registrars spread throughout the country. The Indian Act, referred to earlier, has provided for the post of the Chief Registrar in each state. Besides, there is the Registrar-General, India, appointed by the Central Government.

Last, but not the least, the general people have a fear of the paperwork and red tape involved in dealing with the local bureaucracy. Besides, lack of easy access to a registration centre may discourage the people from registering births and deaths.

The need for registration of births and deaths can hardly be over-emphasised. It has been aptly said that the importance of registering births and deaths is not merely for civic reasons. It provides a profile of society, and serves as a continuous and permanent source of crucial statistics. For any government, a fair idea of the numbers involved would be a vital input in the task of planning and future projections, especially in the case of decentralised planning in the country. What is needed is a full-fledged campaign, in both the print and audio-visual media, to make people aware of their responsibility to get births and deaths in the family registered.

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