

India alerted about Games terror plots

AFP, New Delhi

Western intelligence agencies alerted India to plans by al-Qaeda and Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba to attack New Delhi during the Commonwealth Games, a report said yesterday.

The Press Trust of India, citing unnamed government sources, said militants had trained in the border regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan and planned to attack a hotel among other targets on October 12 and 13.

Despite fears about an attack in the run-up to the Games, the 12-day event passed off without incident owing to a heavy security presence, with 17,000 paramilitary troops and 80,000 police on duty.

The strict measures at venues and hotels drew complaints from some amid accusations that the heavy security blanket had kept spectators away from events.

Lashkar-e-Taiba is blamed by India and the United States for carrying out an assault on three hotels and a Jewish community centre in Mumbai in 2008 that left 166 people dead.

The Commonwealth Games, which concluded on Thursday, brought together 7,000 officials and athletes from 71 countries and territories mainly from the former British empire.

Credentials of all foreign nationals arriving in international airports were checked one-by-one and 20 Quick Reaction Teams were deployed besides keeping ready a special team of 40 army commandos near the sporting venues, including Jawaharlal Nehru stadium.

The government also enhanced security in 32 markets in Delhi by deploying around 1,200 additional paramilitary force personnel which were air dashed from Chandigarh, Jalandhar and a few other places to assist Delhi Police to guard business centres.



Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, right, and his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chavez speak in front of the historical painting "Appeal of Minin" by Konstantin Makovsky while meeting at the Gorki residence outside Moscow on Wednesday.

Iranian president's Lebanon visit a message to the US

NEWS ANALYSIS

AFP, Beirut

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sought through his controversial visit to Lebanon this week to send a clear message to Washington that Iran is a key player in the Middle East, analysts say.

"Iran has become an actor that cannot be ignored because it has some major cards to play in the region," political analyst Amin Kammurieh told AFP.

"Tehran's presence in southern Lebanon through Hezbollah, and in the Gaza Strip through Hamas, is a message that US attempts to isolate it are useless," he added, referring to Islamist groups blacklisted as terrorist organisations by Washington.

The United States and its allies have been locked in a long-running dispute with Tehran over its nuclear programme and have sought to isolate the Islamic republic on the international scene through sanctions.

Oil- and gas-rich Iran insists that its nuclear drive is for peaceful purposes, aimed to produce electricity for its growing population.

Analysts said that Ahmadinejad's two-day official visit to Lebanon, which included a jaunt to the country's volatile southern border with Israel, served as a reminder that Iran had a say in the region through key ally Hezbollah.

"The Americans are being told: 'If you isolate Iran, Iran will come up in Lebanon and elsewhere,'" political commentator Rafiq Khoury said in an editorial in the independent Arabic-language daily Al-Anwar.

"The message is that if Washington wants solutions in the region... it must knock on Iran's door."

Mohammad Saleh Sedghian, head of the Tehran-based Arabic Centre for Iranian Studies, said Ahmadinejad's Lebanon visit was a reminder to Washington that key issues in the Middle East could only be addressed with Iran's help.

After peace prize, China targets winner's friends

AP, Beijing

In the week after Liu Xiaobo won the Nobel Peace Prize for his decades of promoting democratic change in China, dozens of people who openly agreed with his views say they have been detained, roughed up, harassed or kept from leaving their homes.

The latest appears to be a woman who Liu has said should win the prize: Ding Zilin, who has fought for years for China's government to recognize the hundreds killed in the military's crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Liu's wife sent out an alert late Thursday that said Ding had "disappeared" and urged people to "pay attention" to her case.

Specially targeted for harassment after Liu won the peace prize are the first group of signers of Charter 08, the demand for greater freedoms that brought Liu an 11-year prison sentence for subversion and that was cited by the Nobel committee.

"I'm so sorry. I have a lot to say, but I don't dare to talk. I've been confronted several times by police already since Liu Xiaobo won the prize," writer Zhao Shiyang, who signed Charter 08, said Thursday.

"Anyone who signed the charter" is getting police attention, he said. "I hope you understand this life we lead."

Some received threatening phone calls from police as they prepared to release an open letter late Thursday calling for Liu's release, said Xu Youyu, a professor with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences who signed and helped prepare the letter. He said more than 120 people, including prominent activists and journalists, had signed.

"We call upon the Chinese authorities to approach Liu Xiaobo's Nobel Prize with realism and reason," the letter says. It also asks police to

stop "these illegal actions."

"We thought we had to say something," said Xu, who added that he personally had not been harassed. "The government is still doing the same things."

Beijing-based activist Fan Yafeng said he has been roughed up this week by police who watch him.

Zhou Duo, a friend of Liu who took part in the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, said state security officers have kept him in his home since the night of Oct. 9, when he was to attend a dinner to celebrate the peace prize.

Dissident author Yu Jie said his bags were searched when he returned Thursday from a trip to the United States, and police told him that he now must have a police escort everywhere he travels.

Beijing police did not immediately respond Friday to a faxed question about the complaints.

Liu, a protester who played a role in clearing people from Tiananmen Square hours before the military moved in, told his wife he was dedicating the peace prize to the crackdown's "lost souls."

Ding, the activist who founded the group Tiananmen Mothers to fight for the memory of those killed, including her son, had been warned before the peace prize not to give interviews.

Her mobile and land phones in Beijing and the city of Wuxi, where she was last heard from, appeared disconnected Friday.

"The last time I talked to her was Oct. 8 when Liu Xiaobo won the peace prize. We were so happy," Xu Jue, a member of the Tiananmen Mothers, said Friday. "We're really worried she's been taken away. When she was detained before, she would make contact. What if it's worse this time?"

Police in Wuxi on Friday said they would look into Ding's apparent disappearance.

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Lanka's war probe slams rights groups Sri Lanka's government-appointed war probe yesterday reprimanded foreign rights groups that rejected an invitation to testify and said the local panel should not be judged by "preconceived notions".

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