

## Investigators flounder as terrorists strike at will

Nearly 500 people have been killed in nine well-coordinated terrorist attacks across India since the Diwali-eve bombings here in 2005, but no case has been resolved and not one terrorist arrested.

Although the authorities admit that the terrorists are getting increasingly sophisticated and appear linked to one another, investigations invariably reach dead ends after the initial enthusiasm to find the guilty.

Nine powerful bombs went off in 15 minutes in crowded areas in the heart of [Jaipur](#) Tuesday, killing 61 people and wounding 216. They were the latest in a series of carnages that started in [New Delhi](#) in October 2005 when over 60 people were killed just before Diwali.

The worst were the synchronised attacks on Mumbai's commuter trains in July 2006 that claimed 187 lives. The twin bomb blasts in [Hyderabad](#) in August 2007 left 40 dead.

A bomb also ripped through the Samjhauta Express plying from India to Pakistan, killing many Pakistanis too. There have also been blasts in Ludhiana in Punjab, Malegaon in Maharashtra and at the Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti shrine at Ajmer in Rajasthan. Last year, bombs went off in courts in Uttar Pradesh.

The suspicion in most cases has fallen on Islamist groups, based in India and abroad, particularly in Bangladesh and Pakistan. But there have been no firm leads. The victims have included Muslims and Hindus.

No one knows for sure who is planting the bombs - and who are the masterminds.

There is now a clamour for a separate national authority to deal with crimes threatening the country's security or perhaps arming the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the top investigative agency, with a federal role, similar to that of the Federation Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the US.

'We are already late in creating such an agency. It is beyond the resources and capacity of some state governments to tackle terror. Therefore it becomes more imperative to get such an agency off the ground at the earliest,' says Madhava Menon, the head of a government appointed committee that has made the recommendation.

Such a professional body, argues Menon, should be autonomous, like the Election Commission. He feels that the CBI is not independent enough for the job nor does it have the resources, jurisdiction or personnel.

Ajay Sahni, who edits the South Asia Intelligence Review and is an authority on subcontinental terrorism, believes that more needs to be done to augment the police capacities and improve intelligence systems.

'There is no coherence in the 'national response' to terrorism, no evidence of consistent strategy or policy perspective, no institutional memory or visible learning process within the various institutions of governance,' Sahni told IANS.

'We need to derive lessons of past campaigns and counter-terrorism experience in various theatres and to devise protocols, strategies and tactics for appropriate response.'

On numerous occasions, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has lamented that core policing was wanting in the country and spoken of the need to fill up the many vacancies in police forces if they were to face up to the terrorists.

The prime minister has also stressed the importance of sprucing up the intelligence machinery by proper staffing - the main weakness cited by experts.

'The key to success in fighting terror is intelligence - and intelligence needs to be precise and capable of being acted upon,' Manmohan Singh has said.

According to senior officials, despite the manpower available with the Intelligence Bureau, only a fifth was being used to gather hard intelligence.

Although India and Pakistan have set up anti-terror mechanism to share details and cooperate in trans-border terror attacks, there has been little movement forward.

A desperate parliamentary panel asked the government in March this year to grant statutory powers to the CBI to directly look into crimes related to terrorist attacks.

The panel said vesting the CBI with appropriate statutory backing would enable it to play a proactive role in collecting intelligence, creating institutional memory and in capacity building.

'We are of the view that it is in the public interest that in this era of successive waves of terrorist attacks and high technical crimes, a statute is enacted through parliament granting powers to the CBI to directly deal with terror attacks and other serious crimes like human trafficking,' says panel head E.M. Sudarsana Natchiappan.

*Murali Krishnan ( © IANS / India eNews)*