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Series of Bombs Explode on 7 Trains in India, Killing Scores

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MUMBAI, India, July 11 — A string of powerful bombs ripped through a vital spine of Mumbai's commuter train system during the evening rush hour on Tuesday, killing nearly 200 people, bringing India's financial capital to a standstill and resurrecting memories of bloodbaths past.

The Indian police placed the death toll at 190, with the number of wounded exceeding 600, according to the Press Trust of India. The casualties are likely to climb, for if nothing else, it was clear even in the chaotic aftermath of the blasts that the attacks were as cold-blooded as they were well-coordinated, intended to inflict maximum carnage.

The bombs struck at least seven trains along the western railway line of the city's north-south commuter train system between 6 and 7 p.m., virtually within minutes of one another. Every day, more than six million people ride the trains in Mumbai, formerly Bombay, making it among the busiest public transportation systems in the world.

The televised aftermath showed the wreckage of mangled trains, torn limbs and stunned, injured commuters, some with blood-streaked faces. Witnesses said the healthy rushed forward to rescue the most badly wounded. Bedsheets and saris were thrown from people living near the tracks to be used as stretchers.

"It was a horrifying sight," Kishan Namdev Shelke, 57, a train guard, recalled after carrying some of the dead and wounded in his arms.

The attacks bore an obvious resemblance to the terrorist attacks on the London public transportation system last July and the Madrid train bombings in March 2004. But they also reminded many here of a series of bomb blasts in this city of 17 million in 1993, later attributed to organized crime, that killed more than 250 people.

With much still unknown about Tuesday's blasts and India's own long history as a victim of terrorist violence — much of it predating the rise of global Islamist terrorist networks — it was impossible to draw immediate conclusions about the forces behind the attacks.

For now, there was no concrete evidence linking Tuesday's explosions in Mumbai to any particular group, nor any claim of responsibility. It was not clear how the bombs had been planted, what materials had been used, or whether they were the work of suicide bombers.

The Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, urged calm and blamed unnamed "terrorists" for the attack. The prime minister, in a statement, described the attacks as "shocking and cowardly."

Earlier on Tuesday, a series of grenade explosions struck Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian-administered Kashmir, hitting a tourist bus. Eight people were killed and more than 40 wounded. The violence coincided with local elections in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Both nations claim the Himalayan territory.

“We will work to defeat the evil designs of terrorists and will not allow them to succeed,” Mr. Singh said in his statement.

Pravin Pereira, a graphic designer, was on his way from work when his train, which had stopped at Borivili station on the northern edge of the city, shook violently from a loud blast. The bomb had exploded three compartments ahead of him, in a men’s compartment of the 5:47 p.m. train out of the central station.

“The sound was terrible, really terrible,” Mr. Pereira, 33, said by telephone. “Everyone started running. There were a number of bodies lying there on the railway tracks.”

Artie Jacinto, 41, was on her way home on a train that had just pulled out of the Matunga Road station when she heard the deafening sound of one blast, followed by the screams of the women around her.

The train plunged into darkness, she said. She jumped out as quickly as she could, she recalled later by telephone. Strangers poured out of nowhere to help with rescue operations. She said she watched as a man poured cold water on the head of a badly wounded passenger.

Mr. Shelke, the train guard, said he was in the last of nine compartments of Train No. 1748, from the Churchgate station, when he heard what he described as thunder and lightning. Then he saw bodies tumbling out of the train. He pulled the emergency brake and brought the train to a halt.

The blast that hit Train No. 1748 — the first of the seven — struck shortly before 6:30 p.m. as the train pulled out of the station at Khar Road, a northern suburb, and rolled past the residential area of Santa Cruz.

Kalpana Gosalia, 53, a homemaker, rushed out to her balcony when she heard the blast. The sight before her was ghastly: the roof of the train had been blown off and bodies lay strewn on the railroad tracks. As evening fell, she strung a bright halogen lamp to a tree outside her balcony, to help the rescue efforts. Her daughter rushed down to help carry the wounded.

Nizamuddin Sheikh, the manager of the nearby station at Santa Cruz, ran down to the tracks to carry the wounded and then scoop up valuables — purses, jewelry, papers. He said he locked them in his office.

Well past midnight, under a steady drizzle, railway workers struggled to separate the bloodstained wreckage from the rest of the train, in an effort to open the tracks for Wednesday commuters. The gory detritus of the day littered the rails: shoes, plastic bags, water bottles and saris that were offered as stretchers.

At the Lokmanya Tilak Medical College and Hospital, the dead lay swathed in sheets, waiting to be identified. There were 45 in all, some wounded beyond recognition. Ramesh Gandhi rushed in for signs of his cousin. The body of Manish Manihar, a newly married accountant on his way home, was found.

Mumbai is no stranger to terrorist attacks. A pair of car bombs killed more than 50 people in August 2003. In March of that year, a bomb blast on a commuter train claimed a dozen lives. By far the deadliest attack in the nation's history was in March 1993, when a series of 13 bomb blasts hit the stock exchange and other sites, leaving over 250 dead.

Indian authorities have not said whether Tuesday's episodes in Kashmir and Mumbai are linked. The pattern of the Mumbai train bombings, however, has fueled unsubstantiated speculation that Islamic militants, fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, could be behind the attacks.

It would not be the first time that Kashmiri militant outfits, which India says enjoy the support of rival Pakistan, have struck on Indian soil. The most serious of them, an attack on the Indian Parliament in the capital, New Delhi, in December 2001, prompted a military standoff between the nuclear-armed neighbors. India blamed the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Since then, India and Pakistan have been engaged in a peace effort, though their fundamental difference over Kashmir is far from resolved.

Officials in Washington said that it was too early to know definitively who was behind the bombings, but that there are suspicions that it was the work of Lashkar-e-Taiba.

One counterterrorism official, who was granted anonymity to speak about the investigation into the bombings because it was in progress, said that if Lashkar-e-Taiba was indeed responsible, the attacks would be the most sophisticated and deadly that the group had yet carried out.

"It would be a ramp-up of what they have pulled off before," he said.

Pakistan's president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, condemned the attacks.

In a statement, President Bush said, "The United States stands with the people and the government of India and condemns in the strongest terms these atrocities, which were committed against innocent people as they went about their daily lives."

India is increasingly allied with the United States, but it has resisted invitations to join the United States-led war in Iraq.

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