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India: Anti-Terrorism Squad chief dies in **Mumbai attacks**

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Text of report by Indian news agency PTI

Mumbai, 27 November: He wore a helmet, talked on his cellphone and finally put on a bullet-proof jacket before he met his deathly fate in the country's biggest terror seize. Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) chief Hemant Karkare, who was probing the Malegaon blasts case, suffered three bullet injuries in his chest as he was leading the offensive against the terrorists in one of the places the ultras had holed out early Thursday morning.

The last television visuals of the 54-year-old officer showed him in a light blue shirt and dark trousers surrounded by uniformed policemen armed with firearms and walkie-talkies.

Karkare, a 1982 batch IPS officer, became the head of ATS in January this year following his return to the state cadre after serving seven years in Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in Austria.

One of the brightest officers, Karkare had solved the serial bomb blasts in Thane, Vashi and Panvel and was also credited for the stunning revelations in the investigation of the 29 September blast in Malegaon. He is known for his discipline and fair investigation. During the Malegaon investigation, Karkare had told his officers not to create false evidence, saying, "We should do our job and it is for the court to decide."

Incidentally, the Pune ATS on 26 November reportedly received phone calls threatening to blow up the residence of Karkare "within a couple of days".

In his last interview to a television channel yesterday, he referred to getting the custody of Malegaon blast accused Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur, and said "police custody would have helped investigations to proceed faster but still we will see how best to deal with it in a legal way".

When asked about criticism levelled by BJP leaders especially, L K Advani's outbursts against the agency, Karkare said "when allegations are made anyone (we) will feel hurt."

He rejected charges of the Sadhvi being tortured during police custody. "We are going by the copy book. We are producing the accused in court whenever orders for the same are issued by the court," Karkare had said.

Among the other police officers dead in the Wednesday night's terror attacks are Vijay Salaskar, who had killed around 75 dreaded criminals in police encounters.

After being out of the spotlight for quite sometime, the encounter specialist was given the plum posting of heading of the anti-extortion wing of the crime branch.

Another officer, Ashok Kamte, a 1989 batch IPS officer, was the DCP, Zone 1, in Mumbai and was also the key officer in state police. He had also served as the commissioner of Solapur and was always known to be in the thick of action.

Kamte was killed while fighting terrorists at Metro Cinema in the city along with encounter specialist Vijay Salaskar.

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