



## Court tells Crime Branch to speed up 26/11 case

Directs them to hurry up leading the evidence so the court can finish recording it by the end of the month

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The special court hearing the 26/11 trial pulled up the Crime Branch on Wednesday for not producing extra witnesses, and directed them to expedite in leading the evidence, so that it is recorded by September-end.

Special Judge M L Tahaliyani told Ramesh Mahale, the chief investigating officer in the case: "You keep five witnesses present in court, of whom your Special Public Prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam discharges one, leaving just four to depose. The court proceedings get over by 3.30 pm every day. The speed has slackened down a lot."

The judge commented after learning that around five witnesses, including one from Hotel Taj who was held hostage for over two hours, would be examined. In a lighter vein, he remarked, "Ab lagaam mere haath mein lena hoga (I will have to personally take charge of the situation now)."

The court then asked Mahale to keep at least seven witnesses present in court on Thursday by 11.30 am.

What also upset the court was the prosecution failing to examine any of the injured persons or witnesses in the Cafe Leopold case. Mahale explained that many witnesses are not available, as some have gone to their native places and some are bedridden. "When they can give interviews to television channels, why can't they come to the court?" the judge asked.

The judge insisted he will issue summons, especially to the Cafe Leopold attack witnesses, and ensure their presence in court. The court also went through the calendar and noticed that there were only 13 working days in September, due to public holidays and weekends off, and observed that is why the officers should work more efficiently.

Even on previous occasions, the court has stated that the trial's speed has slackened compared to April and May, when the trial opened and around six witnesses were examined every day. However, the pace has taken a beating since captured terrorist Ajmal Qasab made his 'plea of guilt' before the court on July 20. The prosecution has indicated that it will be examining around 230 witnesses, with 183 witnesses having been examined. "If around five witnesses are examined every day, recording of evidence could be completed by the end of the month," Mahale said.

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### 'Threat of a war'

On Wednesday, the prosecution examined Police Inspector Prakash Bhoite who carried out the initial investigation in the Taj hotel attack case. Bhoite deposed that one of the two boxes containing the RDX bomb found near the Taj premises, bore a chit with the words "Threat of a war" in Urdu.

The Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad diffused two bombs, one at the rear of Taj hotel and

another near hotel Gokul behind Cafe Leopold.

A watchman working opposite the cafe, Sachin Sorte, who identified one of the attackers in the morgue, was also examined.

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