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Pakistan Charges 7 Terrorism Suspects a Year After Attacks That Shocked Mumbai

By SAHAR HABIB GHAZI and [SABRINA TAVERNISE](#)
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ISLAMABAD, [Pakistan](#) — Seven Pakistanis accused of planning last year's attacks in Mumbai, India, were formally charged Wednesday, the eve of the first anniversary of the assault. The attacks left 163 people dead and have become a major sticking point in relations between India and Pakistan.

Charges against the suspects had been expected since February, when Pakistan said it was holding several men and [acknowledged](#) for the first time that the attacks had been planned in Pakistan. But months of [postponements](#) and legal hearings followed, delaying the indictments until Wednesday.

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The seven include the man suspected of being the operation's organizer, [Zaki ur-Rehman Lakhvi](#), the commander of the Pakistani militant group [Lashkar-e-Taiba](#); Hammad Amin Sadiq, who is accused of coordinating the financing; and Zarar Shah, described as a computer and networks expert. All pleaded not guilty, according to a defense lawyer.

But Pakistan has said it does not have enough evidence to charge the man Indian and Western officials have accused of masterminding the attacks: [Hafiz Muhammad Saeed](#), one of the main founders of Lashkar-e-Taiba.

The case is highly charged, in part because Lashkar-e-Taiba was nurtured by Pakistan itself as part of a proxy war against India in the disputed Himalayan territory of Kashmir. Recruiting took place in the open on college campuses throughout the 1990s but was stopped after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Pakistan says that it has stopped all support to the organization and that splinter groups are now operating as rogue militants. But the government has been slow to act against them, casting doubts that the authorities have cut all ties with Lashkar-e-Taiba.

Fraught relations between Pakistan and India, both armed with nuclear weapons, [deteriorated further](#) after the Mumbai attacks, as Pakistan denied any connection; India suspended peace talks while pressing Pakistan to bring the plotters to justice.

The charges against the seven suspects will offer a crucial test of Pakistan's will to pursue the case.

On Wednesday, the Indian prime minister, [Manmohan Singh](#), in Washington on an official visit, welcomed news of the charges but said that Pakistan had not gone far enough to pursue militants within its borders.

"It is our strong feeling that the government of Pakistan could do more to bring to book people who are still roaming around in the country freely and to dismantle the

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infrastructure of terrorism, and I can only hope that there will be progress in that area,” Mr. Singh told reporters, according to Agence France-Presse.

Pakistan’s interior minister, Rehman Malik, said by telephone that Pakistan was carrying out its promise to put the accused men on trial.

The hearing on Wednesday was in a makeshift courtroom in a high-security detention center in the city of Rawalpindi, where Pakistan’s Army is based, just outside Islamabad, the capital.

A defense lawyer characterized the prosecution’s case as weak and concocted. “The charges leveled against the accused are not supported by witness testimony and documentary evidence,” said Shahbaz Rajpoot, one of five lawyers representing the defendants. “These charges are being framed upon pressure from external forces.”

But Pakistan’s criminal justice system is extremely weak. Intimidation of witnesses is routine, and prosecutors will be hard pressed to persuade people to take the stand against such a powerful, well-connected militant group.

Because of political wrangling between India and Pakistan, evidence is being exchanged through ministries instead of law enforcement agencies, possibly complicating the trial, said Ahmer Bilal Soofi, an international law expert.

The next hearing has been set for Dec. 5.

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