

Mumbai attacks: Are they British?

British police have flown to India to establish whether any of the terrorists who killed 150 people in the Bombay massacre had links to the UK.

By Damien McElroy in Bombay and Gordon Rayner

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Mumbai's chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh said two "British-born Pakistanis" were among eight gunmen captured alive during bloody shoot-outs with soldiers.



Mumbai police on duty near the Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus

The Daily Telegraph has also learnt that the terrorists monitored international reaction to the attacks on British newspaper websites and on Arabic websites popular in the north of England.

Gordon Brown said it was still too early to say whether any of the terrorists were British-born, while the Home Office said it had "no knowledge" of any UK suspects.

As the siege at one Mumbai hotel entered its third night, further gunfire and explosions were heard at the Taj Mahal hotel after a day of fighting between the terrorists and Indian commandos.

Security officials said "three or four" gunmen were still inside the hotel building with all hostages freed, according to reports.

Meanwhile, officers from Scotland Yard were working alongside their counterparts in Mumbai to confirm the nationalities of the killers.

One commando leader described how suspicions of a British link had been raised when investigators examined BlackBerry mobile phones seized from some of the captured Islamic extremists, which they had used to monitor the internet.

General Noble Thamburaj, head of India's southern command, told the Telegraph: "There was a lot of content from the English media, not just in London but the Urdu and Arabic sites that are very strong in the north of England.

"We have some analysis started on this and we will pass it on to Scotland Yard."

Gen Thamburaj said at least five of the terrorists had used BlackBerrys to monitor British websites.

The use of BlackBerrys by the terrorists to monitor international reaction to the atrocities – and to check on the police response – provided further evidence of the highly organised and sophisticated nature of the attacks.

Two of the killers were members of staff at the Taj Mahal hotel, according to one report, and two others were staying there as guests, enabling them to plan the attack and gain an edge over security forces by familiarising themselves with the layout of the labyrinthine Edwardian building.

Last night, at least one gunman was still holding commandos at bay inside the Taj Mahal, where gunfire, explosions and fires continued throughout the day.

Asked about a possible British link to the attacks, Gordon Brown said he had spoken to his Indian counterpart, Manmohan Singh, and: "At no point did he suggest to me that there is evidence at this stage of any terrorists of British origin, but obviously there are huge investigations that are being done."

Britons were among 93 people freed from the Oberoi hotel as commandos finally ended the siege there.

They included Mark Abell, a lawyer from London who had earlier spoken to the Telegraph from his hotel room to describe his ordeal, and who said he was now looking forward to "going home and seeing my wife".

Soldiers described horrific scenes as they found 24 bodies in the Oberoi, while another 50 bodies were found inside the Taj Mahal hotel as

soldiers cleared all the guest rooms.

A siege at an orthodox Jewish centre in Mumbai came to a bloody end when the building was stormed by special forces. A Rabbi and his wife were among five hostages who were shot dead by their captors before the Indian soldiers could free them.

One Briton – businessman Andreas Liveras – was killed in the attacks and at least seven were injured, including Michael Murphy, a teacher from Northumberland who remains in intensive care, and Harnish Patel, 29, from Havant, Hants., who is being treated for three gunshot wounds.

Mr Patel was in the Café Leopold when the attacks began on Wednesday night.

He said: "A gunman walked in and that was it. He kept showering us with shots. I was so lucky – the guy just took one look at me and showered the whole side of the bar. It's unimaginable. Luckily, he didn't keep his finger down because if he did, I'd be gone."

British tourists arriving back at London airports said they had almost given up hope of surviving the sieges.

Jonathan Chitty, who was caught in a bar next to the Taj Mahal hotel as the terrorists went on the rampage, said: "I was in a store cupboard for about an hour-and-a-half. I felt helpless.

"We were just waiting for them to come upstairs and desperately hoping that they wouldn't. It was so cramped and there was no escape, there was no means to defend ourselves. I thought, 'I'm dead'."

The Indian security forces faced growing accusations that they had bungled their response to the attacks, with one British official saying: "They are supposed to set up a command centre in complete control as their first priority. Instead they arrived and went in guns blazing.

"It was blind. They didn't have maps of the hotels, yet there terrorists had done enough reconnaissance to use the service facilities to manoeuvre."

A senior Indian special forces source said: "There were far too many command centres with each one trying to best the other which led to confusion and delayed operations.

"There appears to have been a lack of detailed, precise planning."

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