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'IB-CBI tussle will hurt us badly'

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Home Ministry officials say Pakistan likely to push back on 26/11 demands

The ongoing tussle between the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) over allegations of involvement of an IB officer in the Ishrat Jahan fake encounter case may give Pakistan a chance to push back on India's demand that it do more to punish those responsible for the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks of 2008.

The most recent — and potentially most damaging — product of the bickering between the two agencies is the leaking of a letter written by a junior former official of the Home Ministry in which he accuses the CBI's lead investigator in the Ishrat Jahan case of saying both 26/11 and the attack on Parliament in 2001 were orchestrated by the Indian government.

Details of the letter written by R.V.S. Mani were leaked last week, presumably in order to undermine the credibility of senior IPS officer Satish Verma, who led the CBI investigations that saw eight Gujarat police officers chargesheeted and several IB men named for complicity in the murder of Ishrat Jahan.

After first being published in the *Times of India*, Mr. Mani's letter has been seized upon by Pakistani newspapers and TV channels to buttress the claim that 26/11 and the Parliament attack were not done by Pakistan-based terrorists but stage-managed by India.

In his letter, Mr. Mani, who signed affidavits on behalf of his Ministry in the Ishrat Jahan case, has complained about pressure being put on him by senior IPS officer Satish Verma to implicate the IB in the drafting of a key affidavit. He added that Mr. Verma also believed the attacks on Parliament in 2001 and Mumbai in 2008 were set up "with the objective of strengthening the counterterror legislation."

"The way the Pakistani media has blown up this news, it is just matter of days before the Pakistan government again denies any role of Pakistani elements in the 26/11 Mumbai carnage," a senior Home Ministry official told *The Hindu*. "The IB-CBI tussle may hurt us badly," he added. Though Home has yet to receive any letter or document from Mr. Mani, who has since shifted to another ministry, it may order a probe into the entire episode.

In Pakistan, the *Express Tribune* reproduced the entire Indian news report and headlined it — 'Startling revelations: Mumbai, Parliament attacks orchestrated.' "In a shocking disclosure a former officer of the Indian Home Ministry has alleged that the Indian government had orchestrated the two high-profile terrorist attacks which New Delhi has blamed on Pakistan-based militant groups," its report on Monday said.

Similarly, *The Nation* published the story as its first lead, titled 'Indian govt behind Parliament, 26/11 attacks', while *Pakistan Today* wrote 'Indian officer claims govt behind Parliament, 26/11 attacks'. By Tuesday, Mr. Mani's allegations against Mr. Verma had become, in the telling of Pakistani TV anchors, a "court document," a "sworn affidavit," and most studio guests in discussion shows on the subject took the view that Pakistan must formally take up the matter with India and stop giving in to Indian demands that it act against the Lashkar-e-Taiba.