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Why did NSG take 9 hrs to get there?

TNN | Nov 30, 2008, 05:08AM IST

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NEW DELHI: The terrorists strike Mumbai at 9.30pm. Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh is in Kerala. He is briefed about the attack on the city's prime locations. By the time Deshmukh grasps the enormity of the situation, 90 minutes have gone by.

He rings Union home minister Shivraj Patil at 11pm and asks for NSG commandos. "How many men?" Patil asks. "200," says the CM. Patil calls NSG chief J K Dutt and tells him to send 200 battle-ready commandos to Mumbai.

Most of the NSG men have to be roused from sleep. They don their uniforms, strap on safety gear, collect ammo and firearms. It is discovered that the only plane that can take 200 men, the IL 76, is not in Delhi but Chandigarh. Precious minutes are ticking by.

The IL 76 pilot is woken, the plane refuelled. It reaches Delhi at 2am. By the time the commandos get in and the plane takes off, four-and-a-half hours have elapsed. Experts say that unless a response is mounted within 30 minutes of an attack, the enemy can assume key defensive positions.

It takes the aircraft almost three hours to land at Mumbai airport. Unlike the Boeing and Airbus, IL 76 is a slow plane. By the time the NSG commandos board the waiting buses it is 5.25am.

The buses take another 40 minutes to reach the designated place in south Mumbai where the commandos are briefed, divided into different groups and sent out on their mission.

By the time they start their operation, it is 7am — in other words, nine-and-a-half hours after the terror strike.

Many lives might have been saved had this delay not happened. The obvious question is why is the NSG stationed only in Delhi. When Indian cities are vulnerable to terror attacks, why is there no commando force like the NSG, or its units, in every city?

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