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Maharashtra ATS chief Rakesh Maria takes charge as Mumbai Police Commissioner

Maria cracked 1993 Mumbai serial bombings case and probed the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.

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Maria is also considered one of the officers who helped crack down on the Mumbai underworld. (Express Archive)

Rakesh Maria was appointed as the Mumbai Police Commissioner Saturday, a fortnight after his predecessor Satyapal Singh quit the post to join politics. Singh, the first serving Mumbai police chief to resign, was due to retire in 2015.

The decision to appoint Maria, currently the chief of Maharashtra Police's Anti-Terrorism Squad, was taken after a high-level meeting here chaired by Chavan and attended by Home Minister R R Patil.

Maria, a 1981-batch IPS officer, headed the probe into the 1993 Mumbai blasts and was also in-charge of the investigations into the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai.

Maria's place at the ATS will be taken by Himanshu Roy, the joint commissioner of police (crime) in Mumbai who has now been promoted to the rank of additional director general. Mumbai police's crime branch will now be headed by Sadanand Date, currently serving as the joint commissioner of police (law and order). Date's place will be taken to Dhananjay Kamalakar.

In all, 84 senior officers have been transferred in the latest reshuffle.

Satish Mathur, K L Prasad and Vijay Kamble will take over as police commissioners of Pune, Navi Mumbai and Thane, respectively.

During the past two weeks, ruling alliance partners [Congress](#) and NCP had been locked in a tug-of-war over the selection of the new Mumbai police chief.

According to sources, while the NCP pitched for Maria citing his track record and experience, Congress was trying to prevail on the CM to prefer either Ahmed Javed or Vijay Kamble, who were also among the four officers shortlisted by the Police Establishment Board.

A senior Cabinet minister belonging to the Congress said, "Being an election year, we wanted to send a politically correct message that we are not ignoring the candidates representing the minorities or Dalits."

Sources in the CMO said, "Chavan wanted to go by the rule book, taking into account seniority and other factors."

Javed was due to be promoted as a director general of police, which made it difficult to consider him for police commissioner's post, which is lower in the police hierarchy. Eventually, Congress's choice fell on Kamble, but the NCP finally prevailed.

Maria earned a name cracking tough cases

One of the most talked about IPS officers in the country, 1981-batch officer Rakesh Maria has an enviable track record of solving several high-profile and sensitive cases during his career.

With a reputation of being a specialist in cracking terror cases, it was Maria who first laid bare the tentacles of the Indian Mujahideen after a series of blasts across the country in 2008.

Be it the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts, the Zaveri Bazaar and Gateway of India blasts, the 2008 terror strikes, the 2010 Pune German Bakery blast and the July 2011 Mumbai triple blasts, Maria played a lead role in cracking them all. Born and brought up in Bandra, Maria's father was a Bollywood producer and film personalities were frequent visitors at his house. He has himself been immortalised in Black Friday, a film based on former Indian Express correspondent S Hussain Zaidi's book by the same name. Maria is also said to have inspired the character Ajay Lal in Suketu Mehta's book Maximum City.

Maria first shot to fame in 1993 when he got involved in the probe into serial blasts by sheer coincidence. Posted as DCP (Traffic) at the time, he cracked the case with the recovery of an explosives-laden scooter in Dadar and an abandoned Maruti van in Worli.

He has since been DCP (Crime), Commissioner of Railways, JCP (Crime), special IG (Training) and additional director general heading the state's Anti-Terrorism Squad.

During his stint as special IG (Training), Maria attempted to introduce psychological profiling of policemen prior to giving them postings.

Maria is known for his ability to extract information from suspects during interrogation, and for his elephantine memory and uncanny ability to recall the dates of arrests, licence plate numbers and other minute details of cases going back several years.

Maria is also said to be a great storyteller, regaling audiences with anecdotes collected over his career, one of them being on the murder of television executive Neeraj Grover

by Kannada actress Maria Susairaj and her fiance naval officer Jerome Mathew in 2008. When Susairaj went to meet Maria to tell him about Grover's disappearance, Maria famously said, "Madam, you are my suspect." Maria also played a key role in the probe into the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai, which concluded with lone surviving Pakistani terrorist Ajmal Kasab being found guilty and executed in 2012.

Maria also outdid others in getting gangster Arun Gawli arrested and convicted in 2008 for the murder of Shiv Sena corporator Kamlakar Jamsandekar. Gawli is now behind bars in the case.

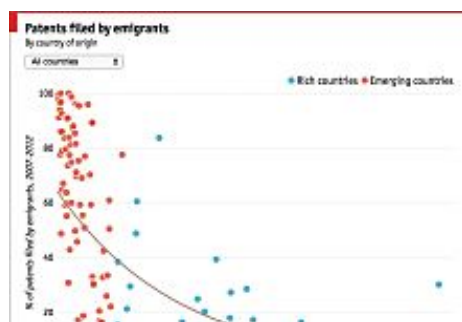
Questions have been raised, however, of ATS's claim in the German Bakery blast case in which Himayat Baig was shown as the main accused. Arrested Indian Mujahideen operative Yasin Bhatkal recently told interrogators that Baig was innocent. A few prosecution witnesses have also told the court they were made to testify against Baig under duress.

Earlier, Maria, had also suffered a setback when the Sessions Court acquitted Indians Fahim Ansari and Sabahuddin Ahmed, who were shown as the co-accused with Kasab in the 26/11 terror attack case. Their acquittal was upheld by the Bombay High Court and the Supreme Court.

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