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World

Captured terrorist reveals plot to kill up to 5000

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AJMAL Amir Kasab, one of the terrorist gang that devastated Mumbai, was under instruction to keep killing until he died.

But the final part of his mission never arrived. He was the only terrorist captured alive during the 62-hour siege and has revealed chilling detail of the co-ordinated attack, according to police interrogators.

He revealed that the gang, thought to number about 15, had plans to kill 5000 people and completely destroy the city's iconic Taj Mahal Hotel. In the end they murdered about 200 and left the Taj Mahal and the nearby Trident-Oberoi badly damaged.

Kasab, 21, had months of training before the attack, where he was instructed in the use of military weapons and explosives. The attackers, aged between 18 and 28, were also drilled on close quarter combat.

Australian witness Ray Lacey, who saw the attackers in the Taj Mahal foyer, said the attackers were highly disciplined and did not waste bullets.

Kasab told investigators they were instructed to conserve ammunition so they could sustain their attack for as long as possible.

"I have done right ... I have no regrets," he reportedly told interrogators.

Kasab told interrogators that most of the volunteers for the suicide mission spoke Punjabi. They were given false identities and were discouraged from interacting with each other beyond what was necessary.

Police believe attacks at the Leopold Cafe, popular with tourists, and at CST station, may have been diversions to provide cover as other gang members stormed their two main targets — Mumbai's two luxury hotels, the Taj Mahal and Trident-Oberoi.

Kasab was pictured, with assault rifle in hand, entering the packed CST railway terminal, where he and another terrorist fired indiscriminately. Kasab and his accomplice, Abu Dera Ismail Khan, also shot dead three of Mumbai's top policemen, including anti-terrorism chief Hemant Karkare.

Kasab was captured at Girgaum Chowpatty Naka in Mumbai while he was trying to escape in a car he had taken from its owner.

Kasab, who is believed to speak fluent English, told police he was trained to "kill to the last breath". Police suspect those who attacked Mumbai were associated with terrorist group Lashkar-e-Toiba, which has links to Pakistan's top spy agency, the ISI.

Investigators say Kasab told them the terrorists planned to destroy the 110-year-old Taj Mahal Hotel in a similar way to the devastating attack on the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, gutted after a suicide bomb attack earlier this year.

There are reports the terrorists also hoped to target the Mumbai stock exchange.

J. K. Dutt, director-general of India's elite anti-terror commandos, the National Security Group, said the terrorists were formidable fighters.

"These terrorists were well trained, which was not expected," he said. "They also had very good knowledge of tactics, which we have seen for the first time over here."

He said the terrorists were "very familiar with the hotel set-up".

The meticulous planning for the terrorist mission took more than a year, investigators say. Associates of the terrorists are believed to have carried out a detailed reconnaissance four months ago. The mission included the covert acquisition of ships and speedboats and careful studies of the tides to allow some attackers to enter the city from the Arabian Sea under cover of darkness.

Kasab told police the attackers had spent time memorising their various targets.

Indian media reported that Kasab was one of four terrorists who entered Mumbai with fake identities, posing as overseas students.

There is great anger in India that a relatively small group of terrorists could mount a siege that paralysed the city for nearly three days.

Yesterday the politician responsible for counter-terrorism, Home Minister Shivraj Patil, resigned.

Mr Patil has been under pressure for months after a spate of attacks in major Indian cities since May.

He resigned amid allegations that authorities received recent warnings that Mumbai was vulnerable to attack from the sea.

KEY POINTS

- * Gunmen instructed to save bullets to prolong siege.
- * Terrorists also planned to destroy the Taj Mahal Hotel.
- * Captured gunman tells police he has "no regrets".