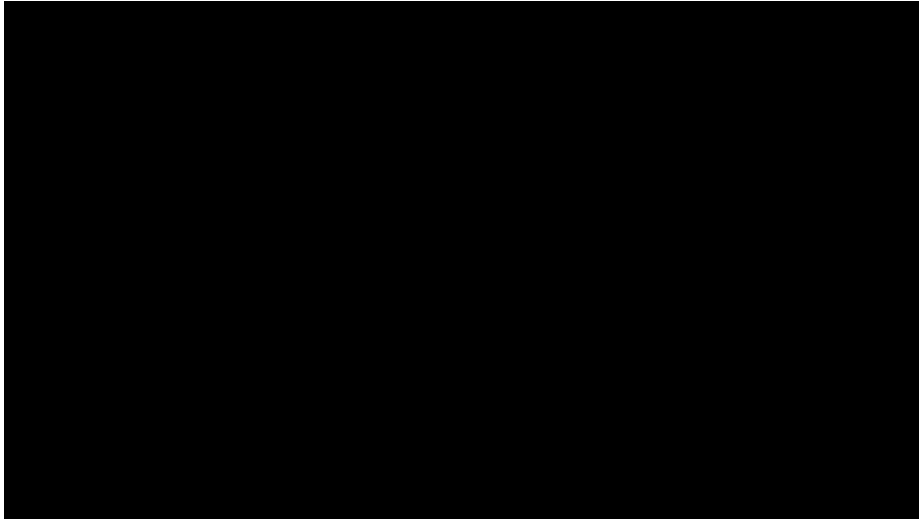


Mumbai attacks: Terrorists monitored British websites using BlackBerry phones

Indian officials suspect the Islamic terrorists in Mumbai may have British links after examining BlackBerry phones they used to monitor news reports.



By Damien McElroy in Mumbai

6:13PM GMT 28 Nov 2008

Key figures in the terrorist gang were equipped with the devices that meant they were able to monitor British news, even when the authorities turned off power.

A senior officer in the country's elite Black Cat commando unit told the Telegraph, the gunmen were able to trawl the internet for information once they lost cable television feeds to the two luxury hotels and office block.

The men looked beyond the instant updates of the Indian media to find worldwide reaction to the events in Mumbai.

Their analysis of at least five BlackBerry mobile phones recovered suggested the terrorists had links to England.

"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," the Commando leader said near the site of the city's third siege at Nariman House. "We have some analysis started on this and we will pass it on to Scotland Yard, no doubt."

The availability of news updates and live TV streams from Indian and foreign media is thought to have given the hostage takers an advantage in the two day siege. By early yesterday army commanders had realised the extent of the problem.

Lieutenant-General Noble Thamburaj, head of India's southern command, said: "I want to pay tribute to the brave army and Indian forces who have died but I will not put a figure on it because that will sustain the terrorists."

A spokesman for the British High Commission said the Indian authorities had not relayed the information and until it did the suggestion was regarded as speculation.

India's foreign minister hinted the terrorists use of Pakistani news organisations was also being compiled by intelligence officials. "According to preliminary information, some elements in Pakistan are responsible for Mumbai terror attacks," said Pranab Mukherjee. "Proof cannot be disclosed at this time."

A leading British expert on terrorism suggested last night the media coverage of attacks was triggering new cult of celebrity among Islamic extremists.

"What the Mumbai terrorists really wanted was an exaggerated and preferably extreme reaction on the part of governments, the media and public opinion," said Paul Cornish, the head of Chatham House think tank. "In these terms, the attackers received as much attention as they could possibly have hoped for, and the Mumbai outrage can only be described as a very significant terrorist success.

"Welcome to the age of celebrity terrorism."

The revelation came as Indian commandos secured major parts a Jewish centre seized by terrorists in Mumbai, discovering the bodies of five Israeli hostages.

The killings bring the death toll from a series of co-ordinated attacks in the Indian capital, also known as Bombay, to at least 143.

Jyoti Krishan Dutt, the director general of the country's National Security Guards, said: "We are on the last floor and any time we will finish this operation."

"Charge of Nariman House (the ultra-orthodox base) will be given to (armed national police force) CRPF and Mumbai Police after the operation is over," Mr Dutt added.

Hassan Ghaffoor, the Mumbai Police chief, has said "the operation is ongoing" but in its "final stage."

Security forces have already gained control of the luxury Oberoi hotel although six militants are thought to remain at large in the five-star Taj Mahal complex.

It is not known how many Israeli citizens were being held by militants in the Jewish centre, although unconfirmed reports put the number at nine. Eli Belotsercovsky, the deputy chief of mission at the Israeli embassy in New Delhi, confirmed the killings. "Five bodies of hostages have been found," he said. "They are Israeli nationals."

Commandos stormed the centre, a business and residential complex run by the orthodox Jewish group Chabad Lubavitch, in the early hours of Friday morning. They abseiled from helicopters on to the roof before entering the building.

It is still not known how many hostages, many of whom were believed to be Israeli, were held inside by an estimated three gunmen. The Israeli embassy has denied reports that Israeli forces were involved in the assault against the militants.

Local television station NDTV has reported that three terrorists and two commandos have also been killed during the exchange of fire in the

centre, and that seven hostages have been released.

Following a huge explosion earlier, some commandos emerged from the centre with their rifles aloft and were greeted with cheers from crowds of people who appeared to believe their presence signalled the end of the operation. However, they were calmed by a police chief using a megaphone, who warned the action had not been completed.

As well as a large hole blown in a wall by the explosion, other sections of the complex have been damaged by grenades used by the troops in an attempt to flush out the terrorists inside.



© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2015