

26/11 report: reality check but no individual evaluation

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Mumbai : With some observations of the Ram Pradhan Committee on the response to the 26/11 attacks being disclosed in an 'Action to be Taken Report' tabled in the legislature, the Mumbai Police got a chance to look at its evaluation report on Tuesday.

The most prominent facet of the report, for the city's police force, was the panel blaming former Mumbai Police Commissioner Hassan Gafoor for "lacking leadership qualities". The report, however, fails to individually evaluate the incoherent response of several other senior policemen that night. While the Mumbai Police lost 12 policemen on 26 /11, the force did not follow a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that had been in place for years and was even updated to deal with terror attacks in the aftermath of the July 2006 serial train bombings.

So, while a clear deployment plan exists, over a dozen top police officers — whose job was to lead, plan and coordinate— rushed to attack sites, leading to the creation of multiple control centres: Joint Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) should have assumed charge of the Police Control Room as the crisis management commander, but it was Joint CP (Crime) Rakesh Maria who was dispatched there. While Additional Commissioner of Police Sadanand Date made repeated requests to the control room for reinforcements, a small team led by him held off Ajmal Kasab and Abu Ismail in a 40-minute encounter at Cama Hospital; teams comprising at least 80 policemen reported they were at Cama, but neither came to Date's aid nor took on the terrorists.

However, it was Gafoor who was seen as responsible for the Mumbai Police waiting for the National Security Guard (NSG) to arrive from Delhi to launch counter-terror operations when there were opportunities to take on the terrorists inside the Taj Mahal Hotel within the first hours and at least corner them if not eliminate them.

One section of officers did not agree with the report singling out Gafoor for lapses. Others, especially non-IPS officers, said it was easy to be critical of the police's response in hindsight, adding that the committee's recommendations will remain only on paper.

As the remarks against the former commissioner became public, a large section of the Mumbai Police on Tuesday reacted with relief that the air of suspicion and resentment building up was finally out in the open. Several top police officers stated that it was vital to address some of the problems that had rightly been highlighted by the committee.

"The committee has recommended that vacant posts should be filled. This is crucial, as there are some 4,000 posts lying vacant in the Mumbai Police. Of these, 1,400 posts are of sub inspector and assistant police inspector level, accounting for almost 35 per cent of that level. More young officers would have been available to deal with the 26/11 attacks had these posts been filled," said a senior IPS officer.

'Taj, Oberoi didn't implement security advisory'

WHAT THE REPORT SAYS

"The tip-off about a possible bomb blast at South Mumbai's Taj Mahal Hotel, World Trade Centre, Oberoi Hotel and a few other locations was taken seriously by deputy police commissioner (Zone 1) and his officials who visited all the sites on November 11, 2008. The very next day, he issued security advisory to both hotels. The Marine Drive police too had issued orders pertaining to security measures to Oberoi Hotel and other hotels,

malls and multiplexes under them. Following an Intelligence Bureau warning about a possible Lashkar-e-Toiba threat to Taj Mahal Hotel and other places, the DCP Zone 1 yet again held a meeting of Taj's security forces in which Taj general manager Karambir Kang was present. The committee is of the opinion that Taj and Oberoi hotels failed to implement the security advisory given by the police. The committee also notes that both the hotels paid no heed to the warning and made no request for increased police security."

(The report goes on to stress the need to make private establishments more responsible when it comes to implementing advisories given by police and to create their own security machinery in consultation with Mumbai police.)

WHAT THE HOTELS SAY

Taj spokesperson: "We continually review our security position on the basis of incoming intelligence and constantly liaise with all relevant security authorities to maintain appropriate levels of readiness and maintain a position of high security preparedness. Taj has always acted immediately on any security recommendations given to it by security forces."

Oberoi and Trident: (Did not comment)