

Mumbai attacks: Lashkar-e-Taiba, India's chief suspect

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the group India accuses of masterminding and executing the Mumbai attacks, has been linked to Islamist terrorist suspects worldwide.

By Massoud Ansari in Islamabad and Damien McElroy in Bombay

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Founded in 1991 by Hafiz Mohammed Saeed, a henna-dyed Pakistani cleric, its goal is to achieve "independence" for Kashmir, the disputed region shared between India and Pakistan, under an Islamist regime.

While the group rejects charges that it is a violent organisation, it is accused of inspiring thousands of Muslim youths with the grievances of the Islamic majority of Kashmir.

LeT, whose name means Army of the Pure, was founded in Afghanistan, where it is said to have shared trainings camps with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Once operational it moved its headquarters to the industrial Pakistani town of Muridke, near the city of Lahore. But it has now gone underground, believed to be loosely based in Srinigar, in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

While LeT has never declared its support for al-Qaeda publicly, it is believed to share many of its goals.

After the July 7 London bombings, LeT was said to be instrumental in the indoctrination of Rashid Rauf, a British-born Kashmir militant linked to the attack. He was reported this month to have been killed by a missile strike by a US Predator drone in the Pakistani tribal areas.

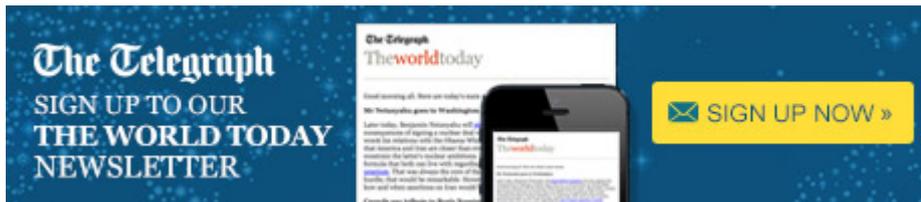
The indoctrination at LeT camps in Pakistan is undeniable but its chief spokesman insisted in an interview with *The Sunday Telegraph* that promoting such ideology should not make it the chief suspect in the Mumbai attacks. He denied any links to the so-called Deccan Mujahideen group, which claimed responsibility for the attacks but is believed by the authorities to be a cover for LeT.

"Neither have we had any thing to do with these attacks nor do we have any kind of links with so-called groups who called themselves as Deccan Mujahideen," said Dr Abdullah Ghaznavi. "What is really bizarre or more seems like an Indian obsession [is that] they started raising their hands on us or other groups."

Dr Ghaznavi, who condemned the loss of life in Mumbai, demanded an independent

investigation of the incident to identify all those involved in planning and executing the attack. He said that the New Delhi government found it politically convenient to blame the LeT, a Kashmiri group, every time there was an attack in India.

But he claimed the charges were confusing the LeT's role as a protest movement against "atrocities" carried out against Muslims in India and elsewhere. "How can you blame someone for act of terrorism if he or she is highlighting the atrocities committed against any one who is oppressed," he said.



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