

Post-Pune Blast Developments - Attempt To Intimidate Foreign Sports Teams

Wednesday, February 17, 2010



By B. Raman

Two developments originating from Pakistan after the explosion in the German Bakery of Pune on February 13, 2009, call for comments.

The first is the claim reportedly made by an individual to Ms. Nirupama Subramanian, the Islamabad-based correspondent of "The Hindu", the daily newspaper published from Chennai, claiming responsibility for the explosion on behalf of an organisation called the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LET)--Al Alami meaning international.

To quote from the paper (February 17): " Identifying himself as a spokesperson of a group calling itself the LET--Al Almi, an individual using the code name Abu Jindal said the bombing was carried out because of India's refusal to discuss the Kashmir issue in the coming talks with Pakistan. Abu Jindal said he was calling from Miramshah in North Waziristan and the telephone number used to make the call carried an area code common to the Waziristan tribal area and Bannu, the adjoining district in the North-West Frontier Province. When The Hindu tried calling back, though, a recorded voice message said the number was temporarily not in use. No past communique was issued by the LET--al Almi and terrorism experts in New Delhi told The Hindu that no such group was known to exist."

The expression "Al Alami" meaning "International" had been used in the past by Pakistan-based terrorist organisations, which claim to have an international presence. Two examples are the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM), which is a founding member of Osama bin Laden's International Islamic Front (IIF) for Jihad Against the Crusaders and the Jewish People and the Jamiatul-Mujahideen. After 9/11, there were some terrorist strikes in Pakistani territory directed against the US and other foreign targets----such as the kidnapping and murder of Daniel Pearl, the reporter of the "Wall Street Journal", the murder of the wife and daughter of a US diplomat with a hand grenade in an Islamabad church, a suicide attack outside the US consulate in Karachi etc. Pakistani investigators attributed these attacks as well as an unsuccessful attempt to kill Gen. Pervez Musharraf in Karachi to an organisation called the HUM--Al Alami.

On different occasions, Pakistani police officers gave different accounts of its background. Sometimes, they described it as the international wing of the HUM. Some other times, they described it as the wing of the HUM which represents it in the IIF. On other occasions, they described it as a spinter group of the HUM, which had split from it due to differences. They also said that the HUM itself had started functioning under the name HUM--Al Alami after it was declared a Foreign Terrorist Organisation by the US in 1997 because of its involvement in the kidnapping of some Western tourists in Jammu and Kashmir under the name Al Faran in 1995.

The HUM had never made a secret of its extensive presence abroad outside India, including in Southern Philippines, the Central Asian Republics, the Gulf countries, and Chechnya. In fact, it used to brag about it in interviews to Pakistani media. Next to the HUM, the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI) and the LET have a presence abroad outside India. While the HUJI's presence is confined to Bangladesh, the Arakan area of Myanmar, Southern Thailand, the Central Asian Republics, the Gulf countries and Chechnya, the LET is the only Pakistani organisation, which has a presence not only in Indonesia, Singapore and the Gulf countries, but also in the US and West Europe.

Whereas the HUM talks openly about its international presence, neither the HUJI nor the LET do so. The LET, in particular, which is close to the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), never talks of its activities in the West lest the ISI be embarrassed. Till today, it has not admitted that David Coleman Headley and Hussain Rana, presently facing trial in Chicago, belonged to it.

The only occasions when the LET had referred to its interests in overseas targets other than India were with reference to the need for a jihad against the US troops in Iraq and the need for action against the Danish newspaper and its cartoonist for publishing cartoons of Prophet Mohammad in 2005. One never found in the past any reference to an Al Alami wing of the LET.

It will be difficult to establish the authenticity of the telephone call received by The Hindu correspondent as having really originated from a designated representative of an organisation called the LET -- Al Alami. If one presumes that such an organisation exists and that the call did originate from its spokesman, it would mark an attempt by elements based in Pakistan to project the LET --Al Alami as part of bin Laden's IIF unconnected with the Jamaat-ud-Dawa of Pakistan headed by Prof-Hafeez Mohammad Sayeed. It is similar to the attempt made after the 26/11 terrorist strikes to project them as having been carried out by a group of Indian Muslims called the Deccan (Southern) Mujahideen.

The second development calling for comments is the E-Mail received by the Karachi-based correspondent of "Asiatimes Online" purporting to be from Ilyas Kashmiri, a Pakistani national, who has been indicted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) along with Headley and Rana for conspiring to launch a terrorist attack on the offices of the Danish journal which carried the cartoons. According to well-informed Pakistani journalists such as Hamid Mir, Ilyas used to be in the Special Services Group (SSG) of the Pakistan Army before drifting into the world of terrorism -- initially in Afghanistan, then in Kashmir and now in North Waziristan.

Till some years ago, he used to be responsible for the operations of the HUJI in J&K. He has since fallen out with the HUJI and now heads an organisation called the 313 Brigade based in North Waziristan. Headley, who had met Ilyas in North Waziristan, was a common cut-out of the LET and Ilyas. He was helping the LET in its acts of terrorism in India and Ilyas in his planned attack on the Danish journal. For details of Ilyas and his 313 Brigade, please see my earlier two articles titled: LET Revives 2003 Plan to Use US As Launching Pad for Terrorism in India at <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers35/paper3481.html> and The 313 Brigade at <http://ramanstrategicanalysis.blogspot.com/2009/11/313-brigade.html> .

In the past, Ilyas had come to notice for his activities on behalf of the HUJI in J&K, but not in Indian territory outside Kashmir. But, HUJI cadres---from Pakistan as well as Bangladesh--- have been active in Indian territory outside J&K for many years. In the E-mail, Ilyas has sought to intimidate intending foreign participants in the World Cup Hockey league, the IPL Cricket League and the Commonwealth Games in India in the coming months into cancelling their participation by warning them of the consequences of their participation.

Since the terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore last year, foreign sports teams are not prepared to participate in any events in Pakistan, which has been totally boycotted. Ilyas' attempt to intimidate is part of a Pakistan-inspired Psywar to create similar nervousness among foreign sportsmen and sports officials about the likely dangers of participating in sports events in India.

Three prestigious sports events are to take place in India this year. The terrorists will look upon these events as providing an opportunity to publicise their cause and embarrass India. A similar attempt to intimidate sportsmen was made by the Khalistani terrorists at the time of the Asian Games in New Delhi in 1983. On getting information of their plans, Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, personally monitored the security arrangements through Rajiv Gandhi and Arun Singh and requested R.N.Kao, former chief of the R&AW, to co-ordinate the physical security. Kao did so with the help of K. Sankaran Nair, who had succeeded him as the chief of the R&AW.

Keeping in view the likely threats and the high-profile attempts at intimidation initiated by Ilyas, the Government should constitute a high-power committee of senior officials to monitor the situation on a day-to-day basis and coordinate the physical security. The matter should not be handled in a routine manner as the follow-up action on Headley's visits to India seem to have been handled.

B. Raman is Additional Secretary (ret'd), Cabinet Secretariat, Govt. of India, New Delhi, and, presently, Director, Institute For Topical Studies, Chennai. E-mail: seventyone2gmail.com

