

INDIA VOWS TO BATTLE TERRORISM 'HEART-SHATTERING': Bay Area residents anxiously try to reach relatives, friends in Bombay

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The bomb attacks on Bombay's commuter trains sent shock waves Tuesday through the Bay Area, where immigrants tried to contact friends and relatives, mourned the dead, and kept track of news from their homeland.



"When I heard the news, it was very disturbing and heart-shattering. If you talk to any Indian, they have a relative or friend in Bombay, because it's the economic capital of the country," said **Vilas Thuse**, 51, president of an **East Bay association** of about 300 families hailing from the **Maharashtra** state on the west coast of India.

For Indians, Bombay -- the most populous city in India, with 16 million people -- is a cosmopolitan combination of New York and Hollywood, home to financial markets, corporate headquarters and the country's booming Bollywood Hindi film industry. Its economic and symbolic importance have made Bombay a target for terrorist attacks, including a 1993 bombing that killed more than 250 people and a 2003 bombing that killed about 50.

Though Tuesday's attack took place on the other side of the world, the impact reverberated through the Bay Area. The region is home to more than 157,000 Asian Indians and 8,100 Pakistanis, according to the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California, which based a report on U.S. census data. Many migrated here for tech jobs over the past decade.

Balaji Srinivasan, 34, of Fremont grew up in Bombay, which he describes as "always bustling, alive, no matter what time of day."

"India has a lot of very different cultures, languages and affiliations, and Bombay is one place where they all meet," said Srinivasan, director of software engineering at tech startup Intruguard and president of the local alumni chapter of the Indian Institute of Technology, one of the country's top engineering schools, which has 750 members in the Bay Area.

Srinivasan spent hours Tuesday trying to reach his in-laws and extended family. "It's a sickening feeling. The landlines were busy, and the cell phones were out. Usually, within a moment's notice, you can get in touch with anyone. Obviously, there's a lot of distance. When you're not there, you don't know how people are doing," he said.

For residents of Bombay and its suburbs, trains are the primary way to commute, and the attacks have left many people shocked and feeling vulnerable, said Sandeep Deokule, 31, of San Jose.

"The airport can put in security. But a train is an open environment -- anyone can go on a train," said Deokule, a tech consultant raised in Bombay.

Suspicion for the attacks fell on Kashmiri militants who previously carried out nearly simultaneous explosions. Hours before the train attacks, Islamic extremists in Kashmir killed eight people in grenade attacks.

Current tensions between India and Pakistan date to the 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent into India, a

mostly Hindu country, and Pakistan, a mostly Muslim country. Since then, the two nations have fought three wars over Kashmir, a mountainous region between them of about 12 million people.

India has accused Pakistan of backing militants in the past. Pakistani officials condemned Tuesday's attacks.

"India has been suffering for many years, and Kashmir too," said Arun Thaker, administrator of the Fremont Hindu Temple, which was scheduled to hold special prayers Tuesday for the bombing victims.

Abdul Latif, treasurer of the Pakistan Association of San Francisco, warned against blaming Kashmiri Islamic militants. He recalled how Middle Eastern terrorists were initially blamed for the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Timothy McVeigh was convicted of and executed for the crime. "We should not make any judgments."

Ghulam-Nabi Fai, executive director of the Kashmiri American Council, said such attacks were alien to Kashmiri culture.

"We have to join hands to make these kinds of activities stop."

Other attacks

Here is a chronology of some of the major attacks in India, many of them blamed on Islamic militants who oppose New Delhi's rule in Kashmir:

1993 -- Muslim underworld figures tied to Pakistani militants allegedly carried out a series of bombings that struck Bombay's stock exchange along with trains, hotels and gas stations in the city, killing 257 people and wounding more than 1,100.

December 2001 -- Islamic militants attacked India's Parliament in New Delhi, leaving 14 people, including several gunmen, dead. India blamed Pakistan, which denied involvement.

September 2002 -- Militants attacked a Hindu temple in the western state of Gujarat, leaving 33 people, including two attackers, dead. Police blamed Indian Muslims recruited by Kashmiri militants.

March 2003 -- A bomb exploded on a passenger train in Bombay, killing 10 people. The attack was blamed on Islamic militants.

August 2003 -- Two taxis packed with explosives blew up outside a Bombay tourist attraction and a busy market, killing 52 and wounding more than 100.

October 2005 -- Three bombs placed in busy New Delhi markets a day before a major Hindu festival killed 62 people and wounded hundreds. India blamed Kashmiri militants.

March 2006 -- Twin bombings at a train station and a temple in the Hindu holy city of Varanasi killed 20 people. Kashmiri militants were blamed.

July 2006 -- Eight bombs on the Bombay railway killed 190 people and wounded hundreds more.

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