Waking Up to New Variants of Terrors - 26/11 Attack

What is the issue?

• It is ten years since the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack carried out by Pakistan in 2008.

• It is imperative that a relook at the Indian security establishment is taken, given the emergence of new variants of terror.

What are the recent instances of terror?

• India and Mumbai city are no strangers to terror.

• In 1993, over 250 people were killed in Mumbai in a series of coordinated bomb explosions.

• It was attributed to Dawood Ibrahim, reportedly as retaliation for the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

• In July 2006, bomb explosions in a number of suburban trains in Mumbai killed over 200 people and injured several more.

• The most audacious terror attack till the 26/11 Mumbai terror incident was the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001.

• It was carried out by the Pakistan-based terror outfits, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM).
What is the 21st Century scenario?

- Most of the 21st century terror attacks reflect a paradigmatic change in the tactics of asymmetric warfare, and the practice of violence.
- Terror attacks are being carried out across the world by al-Qaeda and its affiliates, the Islamic State, al-Shabaab, and similar terror outfits.
- They are certainly very different from those witnessed in the previous century.
- The 26/11 Mumbai terror attack is one of this kind and was an unprecedented exercise in violence.

What is the case with 26/11?

- It involved not merely a well-trained terrorist group, but also backed by the resources of a state, viz. Pakistan.
- It was a case of ‘war by other means’, in which the authorities in Pakistan, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, the Pakistani armed forces, were involved.
- Seldom has any terrorist group used such highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art communications, including Voice over Internet Protocol.
- Planning for the attack involved the use of a third country address.
- Handlers in Pakistan were given unfettered freedom to provide instructions to the terrorists during the entire four-day siege.
- The choice of the sea route aimed at deception and avoiding detection was again dictated by official agencies.
- The training regimen dictated by the Pakistani Special Forces involved
psychological indoctrination by highlighting atrocities on Muslims in India and other parts of the globe

i. basic and advanced combat training

ii. commando training, training in weapons and explosives, swimming and sailing

A more unusual feature of the Mumbai attacks was the involvement of two U.S./Canadian nationals of Pakistani origin.

They are David Headley (who at the time was a LeT operative) and Tahawwur Hussain Rana.

The Mumbai terror attack went on for nearly four days, from the evening of November 26 to the morning of November 29.

Seldom has a terrorist incident lasted this length of time, since the Munich Olympics massacre in 1972.

From an Indian standpoint, it was perhaps for the first time that an operation of this nature involved

Rapid Action Force personnel

Marine Commandos (MARCOS)

the National Security Guard (NSG)

the Mumbai Police

As is now known, the Mumbai terror attack was not based on a sudden impulse.

Several years of planning and preparation had preceded the attack, even as
the Pakistani President, Pervez Musharraf, was talking peace with then Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh.

What were the shortfalls?

- The Indian security establishment had failed to anticipate an attack of this nature and was not adequately prepared to deal with the situation.
- Secrecy was the very essence of this operation as plans were limited to a mere handful of persons.
- In the LeT hierarchy, apart from Hafiz Sayeed, only a few like Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi (chief military commander), Sajid Mir and Zarar Shah (communications chief) were privy to the operational plans.
- U.S. intelligence is said to have penetrated Zarar Shah’s computer and possibly had far more details of the operation than were actually shared with Indian intelligence.

What are the subsequent measures?

- In the wake of the terror attack, several steps were initiated to streamline the security set-up.
- Coastal security was given high priority, and it is with the Navy/Coast Guard/marine police.
- A specialised agency to deal with terrorist offences, the National Investigation Agency, was set up and has been functioning from 2009.
- The National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID) has been constituted to create an appropriate database of security related information.
- Four new operational hubs for the NSG (National Security Guard) have been created to ensure rapid response to terror attacks.
The Multi Agency Centre, which functions under the Intelligence Bureau, was further strengthened and its activities expanded.

The Navy constituted a Joint Operations Centre to keep vigil over India’s extended coastline.

What lies ahead?

Newer methodologies, newer daringly-executed concepts, and deeply laid plans of terrorist groups are a ground reality.

So terrorism continues to be a major threat with modern refinements and terrorism mutating into a global franchise.

One new variant is the concept of ‘enabled terror’ or ‘remote controlled terror’, viz. violence conceived and guided by a controller thousands of miles away.

Internet-enabled terrorism and resort to remote plotting is thus the new threat.

There are no ready-made answers to this; vigilance is important, but being ahead of these new age terror is even more vital.

Source: The Hindu