



*Original article*

## **D-Company and the 1993 Mumbai Bombings: rethinking a case of ‘crime-terror convergence’ in South Asia**

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**Abstract:** In 1993, a transnational crime organization known as D-Company carried out mass-casualty terrorist bombings in Mumbai, India. The reasons for this action have been attributed to religious grievances. However, little attention has been given to the role played by Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence in supporting the bombings. Taking into account what has emerged in the public domain over the last 28 years regarding ISI links with D-Company and with international jihadist groups more generally, a re-assessment of the 1993 bombings is required. Hitherto regarded as an example of ‘crime-terror convergence’, it appears that D-Company might be more aptly considered an instrument of covert action.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, heroin, gold, intelligence, covert operations.

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## **Introduction**

This article examines why the transnational crime syndicate known as ‘D-Company’ bombed the city of Mumbai in 1993. In what remains the bloodiest-ever terror incident on Indian soil, 257 civilians were killed by 12 near-synchronous explosions. The bombs had been assembled using military-grade explosive smuggled from abroad. The events of that day, Friday 12 March 1993, are considered by scholars as an example of hybridity between organized crime and political terrorism (Rollins, Wyler and Rosen, 2010: 14-16). Yet, their motives have never been fully explained.

Almost three decades have passed, and the 1993 bombings have since been overshadowed by a much-better known terrorist attack on Mumbai. On the night of Wednesday 26 November 2008 ten gunmen who had sailed from the Pakistani port city of Karachi landed on the Mumbai coastline. Splitting into two-man shooter teams, they rampaged through the city, killing 165 people including 25 foreign tourists. The resulting sieges, unfolding at multiple locations, lasted 60 hours before the gunmen were neutralized by Indian security forces (Rath, 2014).

Two terrorist incidents 15 years apart – there seems little to connect the 1993 bombings with the 2008 firearms assault. Not only were the modus operandi different but so were the actors. In 1993 Indian gangsters used explosives, in 2008 Pakistani jihadists used Kalashnikovs. Yet, there were at least three common factors: the sea as a transportation medium for lethal cargo, the launching of coordinated attacks at widely dispersed locations, and the suspected involvement of personnel from Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate.

Steve Coll, a double Pulitzer Prize-winning author, asserted in his 2018 book *Directorate S* that during the 2008 raid, Western governments intercepted telephonic conversations between serving ISI officers based in Pakistan and the ten gunmen in Mumbai (Coll, 2018: 343). The United States later indicted an ISI officer who partly funded the attack, a rare example of a spy being charged for international terrorism (Tankel, 2018). British authors Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark, in their 2017 book *The Exile*, which examines Osama bin Laden's last years in Pakistan, describe the 2008 attack as a collaborative project 'overseen by the ISI's S-Wing and sponsored by Al Qaeda' (Scott-Clark and Levy, 2017: 374).

Over the past decade, American and European writers have supported allegations by Indian officials that ISI personnel have supervised cross-border terrorist operations on various occasions (Riedel, 2013 and Wolf, 2017: 9). The current article revisits the perpetrators' motives for the 1993 bombings in light of this (renewed) awareness of 'state sponsored terrorism', a term which though popular in the 1980s had faded from policy discourse by the turn of the millennium. The article re-casts the 1993 bombings not as an example of the 'crime-terror continuum' (Makarenko, 2004: 132), which implies a binary relationship of varying intensity between two categories of non-state actor, but rather as an instrumentalization of organized crime by intelligence agencies. That is, as an example of a non-state actor working at the behest and through the facilitation of state officials.

In books such as *The Secret War with Iran* and *Hezbollah*, scholars such as Ronen Bergman and Matthew Levitt have described how elements within the Iranian intelligence apparatus used criminal actors to carry out long-distance terrorist strikes in

Latin America in the early 1990s (Bergman, 2009 and Levitt, 2013). More recently, Mark Galeotti in his seminal study of Russian organized crime, *The Vory*, has touched upon the covert usage of gangs as an instrument of geopolitical contestation. He writes:

A particular ‘spook-gangster nexus’ has emerged. On the one hand, the security agencies have long used the *vory* and the criminal networks as occasional tools for leverage and intelligence gathering [...] Gangsters are not just paid but offered immunity in return for carrying out covert missions (Galeotti, 2019: 242).

Thus, it is no longer controversial to suggest that intelligence operatives may employ criminal elements to undercut a targeted nation’s counterterrorism and counterintelligence defences. Sometimes, the intelligence-crime nexus might not be directed towards an operational purpose, and be more of a general exercise in projecting influence overseas. According to *Global Watch Analysis*, a French webportal on geopolitics, Pakistan’s ISI is reported to use criminal syndicates, consisting of compatriots, in Thailand and France. The purpose of these ‘assets’ is allegedly to talent-spot contacts in local government (Tazaghat, 2020). A key source of their revenue is migrant smuggling and document forgery. Whether the ISI itself is encouraging this line of activity is unclear. An argument could be made that merely ‘overlooking’ the work of migrant smugglers yields collateral benefits at minimal costs. It allows a build-up of expatriate communities abroad which can indirectly generate diplomatic leverage over host governments. As long as the smugglers render occasional support to intelligence missions, what they do abroad is not Islamabad’s business. Their specific line of activity could thus be incidental to the larger purpose of having reliable influencers embedded in the socio-economic fabric of foreign countries. Such a posture

would be similar to that followed by the KGB of the former Soviet Union, which sub-contracted operational logistics to diaspora criminal groups (Galeotti, 2001: 105).

Returning to Mumbai: the 1993 and 2008 attacks on the city have hitherto been treated as unconnected events, an approach which colours narratives around them. Researchers have neglected to examine state linkages in the 1993 case, in part because foreign visitors to India were not killed. Instead, a simplistic view exists that these bombings were a freak example of a criminal group deviating from revenue maximization and engaging in political violence due to a context-specific grievance (Makarenko, 2012: 16). A one-dimensional narrative holds that the leaders of D-Company who were predominantly Muslim, wished to ‘punish’ the Hindu-majority population of Mumbai for riots which had recently devastated Muslim neighbourhoods in the city (Mullins and Wither, 2016: 75). The above argument does not explain certain factors, such as:

Why did the 1993 conspirators smuggle a vast quantity of explosive into India and then use less than 5% of it in the Mumbai bombings?

Why did they plant bombs at locations across Mumbai that were mostly of an economic as opposed to a religious nature?

Why did their leaders find shelter in Pakistan, even though this risked generating international pressure on Islamabad to arrest them?

The present article suggests that D-Company, far from acting out of solely ideological motives, was additionally a willing instrument in a Pakistani covert action agenda. The syndicate was not just responding instinctively to events in Mumbai in 1993

but also strategically to a broader trend which threatened its business model. This trend was the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 and specifically the lifting of customs duty on gold imports in 1992 (Bennett, 2014). Suddenly, the syndicate's main source of revenue, gold smuggling to India, was no longer viable. By partnering with the ISI D-Company may have adapted to changing times, seeking to dominate the booming Karachi-based heroin traffic in return for providing on-ground support to ISI covert operations against India (Helfstein and Solomon, 2014: 49). The Pakistani agency would thus enhance the 'plausible deniability' of its own actions.

Information cited in this article comes mostly from Indian media reports. To gain insight into the history of the Mumbai underworld, the author searched online archives of the weekly newsmagazine *India Today*, considered one of India's most prestigious news publications. The search extended from the years 1975 to 2020, covering all issues of the magazine. Supplementary analysis has been incorporated from relevant papers published in academic journals as well as newspaper commentaries. Over the course of several years, the author interacted with some of the leading Indian intelligence officials who tracked the activities of D-Company after 1993. Since information shared by these individuals can neither be quoted nor is it easily verifiable through independent sources, it has not been included in the scope of this paper. It has only served as a reference while sifting through minor contradictions in open-source reporting, contradictions which can occur not due to malice or hidden agendas on the part of journalists, but due to time pressure to convey facts without cross-checking. To provide balance in the narrative, archived issues of two Pakistani monthly newsmagazines were also accessed. These were the *Herald* (the years

searched were 1990-2017) and *Newsline* (1993-2017). However, due to aftershocks which the 1993 bombings have had on India-Pakistan relations, the Pakistani journalistic community tends to almost completely avoid reporting on this event and the possible role of D-Company. Thus, with minor exceptions knowledge of the personalities involved in the 1993 attack comes from Indian (and some American) sources.

### **What is D-Company?**

Headed by Indian-born Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar, D-Company is a mafia-style syndicate engaged in narcotics trafficking, land-grabbing, extortion, currency counterfeiting and contract killings. Besides crime-for-profit, it provides logistical and financial support to international terrorist organizations including Al Qaeda (United Nations, 2016 and United States Department of the Treasury, 2003 and 2015). It is primarily based in four countries: India, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Nepal but has operatives scattered worldwide.

Dawood (often referred to by his first name, and sometimes as the ‘fourth letter of the alphabet’) is thought to be based in Karachi. In September 2001 *Newsline*, a leading Pakistani current affairs magazine, ran a cover story on his residence in the city and the patronage he allegedly received from the Pakistani government (Hasnain, 2001). He has been described as living a kingly lifestyle in exchange for helping his hosts conduct intelligence activities against India (Parth, 2008).

How he rose to become South Asia’s most powerful crime lord remains a mystery. Most details of his life come from the writings of veteran Indian crime correspondent S.

Hussain Zaidi. A prolific author, Zaidi has a talent for story-telling which he demonstrates by collecting vignettes from Mumbai's underworld and law enforcement communities and patching these into true crime bestsellers. His most famous work, entitled *Black Friday*, deals with the planning and execution of the 1993 bombings. A subsequent work, *Dongri to Dubai*, provides glimpses into the personality of the young Dawood as he rose in the Mumbai underworld.

Dawood was born on 26 December 1955. His father was a head constable of the Mumbai police. Partly due to the nature of his job, the father had informal access to two crime lords in the city, known as Haji Mastan and Karim Lala. Young Dawood shared the same religious faith as these men (Islam). Mastan was in the 1960s and '70s the undisputed leader of Mumbai's underworld since his was the largest criminal organization to operate transnationally. Tapping into religious links between India's Muslim communities and the Persian Gulf states, it monopolized the lucrative gold smuggling sector whose supply chain ran across shipping lanes in the Arabian Sea. Access to foreign cash gave Mastan disproportionate influence among the government bureaucracy in a socialist economy, which India had at the time.

In contrast, Lala was into more localized, thuggish and comparatively low-yield activities such as land-grabbing. He provided muscle within the underworld and commanded a following among the ghettoised Muslims of Mumbai's slums. Mastan on the other hand was the underworld's brain, connecting it to the city's politico-business-cultural elite (Zaidi, 2012: 14-40).

During the 1970s, the ruling Indian National Congress courted Mastan. His support for the party, which positioned itself as a protector of India's religious minorities against Hindu majoritarianism, was no secret. The man boasted that '[p]oliticians who criticise me by day come to me at night with a begging bowl' (Bobb and Kapoor, 1985). Dawood, who began his criminal career under Mastan's tutelage in the mid-1970s, likely paid attention such statements. Within two decades, he was rumoured to have launched the careers of no less than 75 Indian parliamentarians through donations to their electoral campaigns (Ray and Tare, 2011). A leading politician in Mumbai allegedly received 720 million Indian rupees over a 13-year period from a hawala operator with ties to Dawood – a colossal sum of money at the time (Joshi, 1996). By operating in the shadow of Mastan and Lala, who between them maintained a largely amicable business relationship, Dawood learnt the value of building a popular base within a defined territory (as Lala had among Mumbai's Muslim community) and political contacts across all religious boundaries (as Mastan had developed). His criminal organization, D-Company, thus came to acquire both depth and breadth, which gave it the critical mass necessary to operate as a microstate within the city.

But that was still in the future. Back in the late 1970s, Dawood was yet a greenhorn who was almost 30 years younger than his mentor Mastan. He posed no threat to the established godfather, whose money power kept the city police on-side and ensured that lesser gangs did not resort to violence and encroach on each other's turf. Things began to change during the Soviet-Afghan War and the rise of heroin-trafficking out of Pakistan. As revenue from the international drug trade poured into Mumbai, which

became one of the waypoints for trafficking to the West, there was a drift towards demonstrative violence (Menezes, 1995). Dawood's brother was killed by a rival gang, which sparked off a bitter fight for dominance.

During this period both Mastan and Lala, who were getting on in age, withdrew from criminal activities to enjoy a quiet retirement. This left the field open for new players to stake their respective claims to overlordship. Dawood was in the forefront, hunting down his brother's killers and decimating their support infrastructure. As his activities grew brazen, the Mumbai police intensified investigations into his network. Sensing that he needed a safe haven, he fled India for Dubai in the mid-1980s (Naidu, 2015). Having settled into a comfortable exile in the Gulf Emirate, he ran his criminal empire in Mumbai through various deputies whom he controlled via telephone.

One of these was a gangster known as 'Tiger' Memon. Like Dawood, Memon happened to be a Muslim. As his nickname suggests, he had a belligerent personality. Unlike his boss, he was known to be reflexively hostile to Hindus, a rarity within the Mumbai underworld where religious tensions were unknown at the time. Memon was a silver smuggler operating under Dawood's aegis (Rattanani, 1993 and Sharma, 2017). Since the 1960s gold smuggled into India from the UAE would often be paid for with silver. As Dawood's point man for the silver trade, Memon had access to maritime smuggling routes and business contacts in the Gulf, a factor which ensured he would play a crucial role in organizing the 1993 bombings.

## **What is the ISI?**

The Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate of Pakistan is a monolithic organization that simultaneously handles foreign intelligence collection, domestic surveillance and counterintelligence, and conducts covert operations (Winchell, 2003 and Mukherjee, 2017). It is predominantly staffed by military personnel. The head is almost always a serving lieutenant general from the Pakistan army. The ISI is distinct from the army's in-house intelligence service, known as Military Intelligence, which deals with matters more strictly concerning the army's professional responsibilities.

Owing to its broad-ranging mandate, the ISI might be better compared to the erstwhile Soviet KGB, rather than to intelligence services that exclusively focus on foreign espionage missions, such as the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), or the Indian Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW). Inaccurate comparisons are sometimes drawn between the Pakistani ISI and Indian R&AW by commentators who are ignorant of differences in their structures and cultures. The latter is an entirely civilian-led organization focused on foreign intelligence collection. Its head concurrently serves as chief of a separate department known as the Directorate-General of Security. This is where India's covert action capability is housed. In the ISI however, such operatives are housed within the agency's S Wing, which is responsible for maintaining liaison with jihadist groups (Tankel, 2016: 54). According to a Pakistani newsmagazine story from June 2001, since the late 1980s S Wing has been

suspected of destabilizing elected civilian governments in Islamabad by orchestrating domestic terror incidents (Ansari, 2001: 30).

In the Indian intelligence system, foreign espionage and covert operations are conducted by distinct entities. Whereas in the Pakistani system, both functions are concentrated in the ISI, together with domestic intelligence collection. This gives the ISI wide-ranging power which it can leverage while cutting deals with foreign proxies. The Indian R&AW has no such power. It especially cannot negotiate deals that impinge on domestic affairs, since these fall under the purview of a separate civilian agency known as the Intelligence Bureau (IB). The IB is the most powerful intelligence agency in India but has no mandate to operate abroad.

This difference in intelligence cultures is significant because it explains why Dawood Ibrahim's criminal network thrived after he moved from the UAE to Pakistan in 1993. Any agreement between D-Company and the ISI that was struck after the Mumbai bombings (or even before, for that matter) could be implemented on a whole-of-government basis within Pakistani territory. Whatever losses might be suffered by its networks in Mumbai, due to crackdowns from local law enforcement, could be offset by gains within Pakistan itself.

### **What happened in 1993?**

The common view about why D-Company carried out the 1993 bombings is that Dawood and 'Tiger' Memon wanted to avenge hundreds of Muslims killed by Hindu rioters

(Varsori, 2016). Mumbai had been convulsed in the months leading up to the bombings by two waves of religious violence.

The first wave occurred in early December 1992, as part of a general country-wide upsurge of rioting. It lasted five days. What triggered it was the destruction of a mosque by Hindu extremists in the town of Ayodhya, roughly 1500 kilometres away from Mumbai. This act of vandalism was seen by many as a political assault on India's Muslim minority.

The cause of the second wave was more mysterious and yet, more local: it began near the Mumbai dockyard with a series of fatal attacks on working-class Hindus. The attacks swiftly escalated into yet another religiously-polarized confrontation (Rahman and Rattanani, 1993). The dockyard was at the time controlled by 'Tiger' Memon. There have been suspicions that this second wave of rioting, which occurred in early January 1993 even as the rest of India was settling into an uneasy calm, might have been deliberately provoked by Memon. Whether his motive was to exact vengeance for the December riots, or whether it was to further vitiate Hindu-Muslim relations has never been established (Gupta, 2013 and Gupta, 2018). What is clear is that there was plenty of opportunity for trouble-making: during the January riots a virulently anti-Muslim political party rallied Hindu miscreants and attacked Muslim households and businesses. Among the businesses destroyed was an electronics store belonging to 'Tiger' Memon, which further infuriated him (Hafeez, 2015).

The renewed violence in January 1993 lasted fifteen days and led to a commensurately greater loss of life than in December. Roughly two-thirds of the victims were Muslim, who made up between 15 and 17% of the city's population (Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights, 1993 and Kaur, 2003). This in itself, was an indictment of the failure of the Indian law enforcement machinery to protect vulnerable communities. The American terrorism scholar Stephen Tankel summarizes what happened next:

In the wake of communal riots that killed hundreds of Muslims, Dawood Ibrahim, the Muslim leader of South Asia's largest crime syndicate known as D-Company, worked with the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to engineer a lethal series of bomb blasts in Mumbai (Bombay at the time) in March 1993. This series of blasts remains the deadliest terrorist attack in India's history and may have helped inspire or embolden would-be jihadists to take action. At the very least, D-Company became an important recruiting vehicle, using its logistical networks and ties to Pakistan to facilitate transit there for aspiring Indian jihadists in search of training and support (Tankel, 2014: 3).

Significantly, most of the locations hit by the bombings of 12 March 1993 were commercial and trading hubs, not religious or political sites. The first bomb went off at around 13.30 hours local time at the Mumbai stock exchange. Thereafter, eleven more explosions occurred at various marketplaces, a cinema and several hotels. Over the span of 130 minutes, 257 people were killed. Based on a tip-off from terrified members of the populace, the city police seized an abandoned van. Inside, they found assault rifles and hand grenades. Another tip-off led to the seizure of an unexploded bomb, complete with its detonator. This, plus the armaments, would prove crucial to tracing the origins of the explosives used in the attack.

### **International rather than domestic terrorism**

Tankel has outlined a widespread view that D-Company carried out the 1993 Mumbai bombings with the knowledge of the ISI (Parthasarathy, 2016 and Sirrs, 2017: 148). This

view is partly based on the confessional statement and accompanying audio-visual evidence provided to Indian investigators in July 1994 by Yakub Memon, a younger brother of ‘Tiger’ Memon. Yakub was a co-conspirator in the attack. He had left Mumbai just hours before the bombings occurred on 12 March 1993, along with ‘Tiger’ and the entire Memon family. They travelled to Pakistan via a brief stopover in the UAE. Arrangements for their departure from Mumbai had been made in advance by ‘Tiger’ with most of the family being unaware why they had to leave India. Once they had reached Karachi, they learnt of the bombings in Mumbai and that they had all been declared suspects.

What happened while they were in transit was that, aided by good detective work and community intelligence offered by the Memons’ neighbours, the Mumbai police had identified ‘Tiger’ as the local organizer of the attack. Having raided his home and found all his immediate relatives missing, the police had assumed that they were complicit.

Yakub told Indian authorities what subsequently transpired within the Memon family. According to his account, the family patriarch fell upon ‘Tiger’ in a rage and thrashed him with a walking stick in view of ISI chaperones (Zaidi, 2015a). Distressed that they were being labelled ‘terrorists’ by the government of their home country, the family ostracised ‘Tiger’ and struggled to adjust to life in Karachi. It was during this time that Yakub decided that he would set out to clear the wider family name. Over several months he surreptitiously gathered evidence of ISI complicity in the bombings. His aim was to demonstrate that it had been primarily ‘Tiger’ as a rogue individual who had organized the bombings using his criminal network (Zaidi, 2015b).

One way to do this was to expose Pakistan as hosting both ‘Tiger’ and his boss, Dawood Ibrahim, who had also left Dubai and moved to Karachi after the bombings. Over the course of a year of living in Karachi as a fugitive from Indian justice, Yakub secretly filmed the locations where the Memon family stayed. He compiled the names of ISI officials who escorted them in the city. Most important of all, he surreptitiously recorded conversations between the bombing masterminds as they discussed the international fallout. Then, allegedly after negotiating with Indian officials via an intermediary, Yakub travelled to Nepal. He allowed himself to be arrested by local authorities and sent to India. His confessional statement, plus the photographs and tapes he provided, was crucial in tracing the Mumbai attack’s provenance to Pakistani soil (Rahman, 2015).

According to Yakub, the bombings were organized by his older brother ‘Tiger’ Memon and a Karachi-based drug trafficker named Taufiq Jaliawala. The two men had previously been business partners in Dubai, where a shared ‘expatriate’ status and common language (Urdu) cut across the political faultlines that normally separate South Asian Muslims in their respective home countries. Indian officials suspected that Jaliawala was a civilian agent (ie., not a serving military official, but a willing collaborator) of the Pakistani ISI. During the course of a secretly recorded conversation, he told Yakub that the ISI had in general terms known about the plan to bomb Mumbai, but not the precise date (‘Transcript’, 1994).

Yakub claimed that Jaliawala had shipped explosives from Pakistan to ‘Tiger’ in India (‘Yakub Memon’s execution’, 2015). This explained why the Mumbai police recovered cartons with explosive residue from the Memon family home with the name of

a Pakistani ordnance factory on them (Ghimire and Rahman, 1994). The shipments occurred in February 1993, five weeks before the bombings. In total, seven tons of military-grade explosives and 300 assault rifles had been moved across the Arabian Sea from Karachi (Rahman and Baweja, 1993: 50). Less than five percent of the explosives were used in the Mumbai attack. The remainder were cached, together with most of the rifles, at various locations across western and central India.

In total, 3.3 tons of explosives, 63 assault rifles, 500 hand grenades and 39,000 rounds of ammunition were seized by police in the following months. The weapons that the Mumbai police recovered from the abandoned van immediately after the bombings were meant to be used in a shooting spree across the city. At the last moment, D-Company gangsters who were detailed to carry out these shootings had lost their nerve amidst the chaos and general panic caused by the explosions. They aborted their plans and fled, carelessly abandoning the van and leaving its incriminating evidence behind (Nandgaonkar, 2015).

Photographic and audio evidence that Yakub Memon brought with him to India exposed the 1993 bombings as what the Mumbai police had claimed them to be: an act of international terrorism as opposed to merely domestic terrorism (Bobb, Baweja, Chakravarti, Katiyar, Rattanani, Parikh and Pathak, 1993). Proof of Jaliawala's association with Dawood included a film showing Dawood at the 1994 wedding of the Pakistani crime lord's daughter. The wedding had occurred in Karachi, even as Pakistani government officials were insisting that neither Dawood nor 'Tiger' Memon were living in their jurisdiction (Zaidi, 2015c).

### **The evidential trail leading to Pakistan**

Immediately after the bombings, several of ‘Tiger’ Memon’s associates who had physically planted the bombs were identified and arrested. Being street hoods, Memon had viewed them as dispensable and thus made no arrangements for their escape. Disillusioned by what they saw as his betrayal, two of them later turned approver in judicial prosecution (Doval, 2015).

At least ten of the arrested men told investigators a bizarre tale: a few weeks before the bombings, roughly two dozen D-Company gangsters had secretly travelled to Pakistan via the UAE. Over a two-week stay in Pakistan, they had received training in weapons-handling and bomb-assembly by persons who sported a military bearing (Pathak and Rahman, 1993 and Maria, 2020). But their entry to Pakistan had not been recorded by immigration officials in that country. This suggested that either all the arrested men were lying, or that arrangements for their journey had involved intricate coordination by high-ranking patrons within Pakistan (Gargan, 1993).

The then deputy chief of the Indian R&AW led the investigation into Pakistan’s suspected role. Together with domestic counterparts from the Intelligence Bureau (IB), he gathered evidence of possible ISI involvement. The nature of this evidence is summarized in his own words:

During the investigations into the serial blasts of March 12, 1993 in Mumbai, the IB and R&AW collected the following evidence regarding the involvement of the ISI:

Photocopies of the manifests of the Pakistan International Airlines regarding the travel of the perpetrators from Dubai to Karachi for training and their return to Dubai after the training;

Their traveling with visas on plain sheets of paper issued by the Pakistani consulate in Dubai so that their Indian passports did not carry any entry of their visit to Pakistan;

Evidence of their being received at Karachi airport and driven directly from the tarmac into the city without having to pass through immigration; statements of the perpetrators in which they gave the details of the training and arms and ammunition given to them by the ISI [...]

All this evidence was rejected by the US as falling short of proving Pakistani complicity.

The police recovered from the blast site some hand grenades of Austrian design and a timer. Austrian experts flew to New Delhi, examined the hand-grenades and certified in writing that these grenades were of Austrian design and had been manufactured in a Pakistani government ordnance factory with technology and machine tools sold by an Austrian company to the Pakistan government. They said the Government of India could use their report for any purpose it desired.

American counter-terrorism experts, who visited Mumbai at our invitation, saw the timer and said that it looked like timers manufactured in the US. They wanted to take it to the US for forensic examination. They promised they would return it after the examination. I agreed to it. After some days, they sent me an unsigned report on a plain piece of paper that the timer had been manufactured in the US and was part of a consignment given by the US to Pakistan in the 1980s.

I pointed out this was the smoking gun which they had been asking for and said they should now be able to declare Pakistan a State sponsor of terrorism. They said this was not sufficient evidence against the government of Pakistan. They claimed that there were instances of leakage of arms and ammunition from Pakistan government stocks into the hands of arms smugglers and contended that the terrorists could have procured it in the smugglers market. They also said their report could not be used by us in a court of law. When I asked them to return the timer, they claimed their forensic laboratory had destroyed the timer by mistake and that they were taking action against the lab for negligence (Raman, 2006a).

The top-ranking R&AW officer never forgave his American counterparts for what he perceived as an egregious breach of trust in counterterrorism cooperation (Rajghatta, 2013). He later wrote:

It has been the experience of Indian officials, who had in the past interacted with counter-terrorism experts of Western countries, that while the experts of other Western countries sincerely co-operated with India and assisted it in its investigation into the ISI involvement, US officials were anything but sincere and tried to weaken the case of India against the ISI involvement in whatever way they can---even by destroying clinching evidence if they had to (Raman, 2001).

In 2013, a senior official in the Indian Prime Minister's Office, who had dealt with both Pakistan and the US, confirmed that in 1993 the Americans had destroyed evidence which implicated the ISI (Private conversation with author).

Such revelations are hardly surprising: since the 1970s Western governments have often looked the other way when an act of international terrorism does not involve their own nationals. This extends to letting perpetrators escape justice if a higher geopolitical argument calls for it (Bird 2014 and Geiser, 2016). Even more egregiously, when the political stakes are high enough justice can sometimes be outright denied despite the victims being high-ranking Western officials.

For example: according to one account, in 1973 the US National Security Agency intercepted telephonic conversations which identified Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat as having personally ordered the machinegunning of the American ambassador to Sudan, along with the ambassador's deputy and a Belgian diplomat (Richelson, 2002: 259). The assassinations were carried out by a terrorist group known as 'Black September' which according to Arafat's publicity department was operating outside of his control. The NSA intercepts appeared to strongly disprove such arguments. Yet, the United States

government chose to maintain the convenient fiction that 'Black September' was a rogue actor. In doing so it left the door open for a political dialogue with Arafat himself. Two decades later, the Palestinian leader was smilingly posing along with US President Bill Clinton on the White House lawn, and forcing a handshake upon a visibly discomfited Israeli Prime Minister Yitzakh Rabin. It does not defy credulity therefore, that the CIA would suppress evidence of ISI complicity in the 1993 bombings, especially since these had killed no Americans.

The Americans had previously shown a reluctance to discuss the issue of ISI involvement with terrorism in July 1992, eight months before the Mumbai bombings. On 16 July, the Mumbai police had arrested a terrorist fugitive called Lal Singh. A Canadian national of Indian (Sikh) origin, he claimed that the ISI had asked him to explore the possibility of bombing a stock exchange in the south Indian city of Madras, which is now called 'Chennai' (Raman, 2006b). He also claimed that the agency was stockpiling arms and explosives on Indian territory and trying to create a coalition of separatist militants within India, who would carry out acts of mass-casualty terrorism (Bhatt, 2002). The coalition would prominently feature Kashmiris and Sikhs who wanted a breakaway homeland called 'Khalistan'. Indian officials dubbed this putative ISI plan as 'K2', which stood for 'Kashmir-Khalistan' (Gill, 2011: 21). At the time, Sikh separatist militants had suffered heavy losses from police action and their Kashmiri counterparts were being stalemated by an Indian security apparatus that had a manpower base large enough to wear them down through sheer attrition. It was thought that the ISI was keen to promote urban terrorism in India to open a new front for covert warfare. Alarmed by the

revelations of the man who had been arrested in Mumbai, Indian security officials invited counterparts from friendly Western governments to interrogate him independently. The gesture was positively received by most. Only the Americans demurred, apparently worried that if they questioned the individual and found his claims to be credible, it would be politically difficult for Washington to avoid taking action against Islamabad (Raman, 2002a).

### **A history of ISI-CIA collusion**

The R&AW deputy chief quoted above suggested that American coyness to question Lal Singh stemmed from a largely unknown aspect of the Soviet-Afghan War. According to his theory, during that conflict CIA officials had worked with their ISI counterparts to boost heroin production in Pakistan's northwest frontier regions. The idea had been to pump the drug into Afghanistan where it would circulate amongst troops of the occupying Red Army, destroying unit cohesion and morale. Subsequently, the drug began to flow out of Pakistan towards the West, as local traffickers realized that it commanded a much greater mark-up in Europe and North America. The R&AW officer sardonically commented that the CIA's operational division in the 1990s was filled with personnel who had earned their spurs partnering with the ISI against the Soviets. These men could not bring themselves to criticize their former Cold War allies lest details of the secret Afghan War heroin programme be exposed (Raman, 2000).

A December 1993 article in the *International Herald Tribune* commented on how the CIA, for the sake of protecting its relations with strategic assets in foreign

governments, stymied efforts by the US Drug Enforcement Administration to track narco trafficking. The article says:

To protect its “assets” abroad, the CIA has ensured that the DEA's concerns outside the country were subordinated to its own. Until recently, no DEA country attaché overseas was allowed to initiate an investigation into a suspected drug trafficker or attempt to recruit an informant without clearance from the local CIA station chief. DEA country attachés are required to employ the standard State Department cipher, and all their transmissions are made available to the CIA station chief. The CIA also has access to all DEA investigative reports, and informants’ and targets’ identities when DEA activities outside the United States were involved. In Costa Rica, when the war against Nicaragua's Sandinista government was at its peak and cocaine was beginning to pour into the United States, the DEA attaché wanted to place cameras at clandestine airstrips from which he suspected drugs were being flown to the United States. The CIA resident gave him a list of airstrips on which he was not to place cameras. They were the strips into which the CIA was flying arms for the contras. Some were also strips from which the DEA agent suspected drugs were being flown to the United States (Collins, 1993).

American journalist Gretchen Peters, in her 2006 book *Seeds of Terror*, describes how during the 1980s the CIA avoided cooperating with American counternarcotics efforts when it came to Pakistan. The agency's highest priority was to protect its contacts in the ISI, who were suspected of involvement in the heroin trade but were also crucial to fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan (Peters, 2009: 45-49, 64-65). Despite media reports occasionally hinting at high-level Pakistani government collusion in drug trafficking, no effort was made to gather information on the subject. It was left to private individuals, including a Norwegian police detective, to trace some of the drug deals and discover that their beneficiaries were ensconced in the highest levels of the then Pakistani military regime (Haq, 1996: 957). Only in 1993, long after the Soviets had left Afghanistan, the Cold War had ended and the Soviet Union itself had dissolved, did Washington see fit to acknowledge Pakistan's role in the international heroin trade. A ‘leaked’ CIA report from

1992 identified then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and several of his relatives and ministers as having patronized drug traffickers. Yet, for all the embarrassment which this report caused, the Americans still supported Sharif's government and even received one of his relatives, who was thought to be actively involved in moving drugs, as a state guest in 1998 (Zada, 1999: 90, 104). Interestingly, similar allegations have been made against current Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, whose entry into politics in the 1990s, according to a doctoral thesis submitted by a Pakistani student in the UK, was not only supported by the country's intelligence agencies but 'was also financed by the drug Mafia and by traffickers in northern Punjab' (Zada, 1999: 90).

### **Fusion of arms and drug trafficking under ISI stewardship**

In January 1993, while Mumbai reeled under the second wave of Hindu-Muslim rioting that presaged the bombings, a major development unfolded off India's coastline. A ship operated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was intercepted by the Indian Navy. The LTTE was a violent separatist group based in northern Sri Lanka, which had assassinated India's former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. Its ship, the *MV Ahat*, was packed with arms and ammunition. CIA officials discovered in May that year that the weapons had originated from Pakistani heroin traffickers. They had been loaded onto the *Ahat* at Karachi under the supervision of the ISI and the Pakistani navy (Raman, 2002b: 68).

The *Ahat* interception linked the ISI with the LTTE, a non-Islamic terrorist group with a support base among ethnic Tamil communities scattered across the Indian Ocean

Region and Europe. These connections, along with forbearance from the ISI, enabled D-Company despite being a foreign actor in the Afghan-Pakistani criminal landscape, to enter the heroin business once Dawood relocated to Karachi in 1993. Previously, the Dubai-based don had been a gold smuggler who ran secondary rackets in land-grabbing and extortion. The latter targeted Mumbai's business elite and film industry (Aiyar and Raval, 2001). His criminal networks were not, prior to 1993, commonly associated with bulk traffic in the Afghan drug trade. All this changed once he moved to Karachi, which was the regional hub for heroin flowing out of South Asia towards the industrialized countries of the West. By the early 1990s, the booming drug trade was thought to be worth 12% of Pakistan's gross domestic product (Gupta, 1990). According to contemporary media reports, including in the *Washington Post*, the ISI was using heroin money to fund paramilitary proxies which conducted cross-border attacks on Afghan and Indian targets (Anderson and Khan, 1994). It was alleged that reasons of statecraft were not the sole motivation either: 'The opium trade reaped considerable financial rewards for many senior members of the Pakistani Army' (Rath, 2013).

In 1994, heroin revenues were estimated to be twice the Pakistani government's budget (Claire, 2020). That same year, D-Company forged a collaborative agreement with the LTTE's Karachi office to transport drugs into India (Pillai and Joshi, 1997). At Mumbai, the cargo would be divided up. Some quantity of heroin would be shipped to the east African coastline, where there was a fairly large Indian and Pakistani diaspora population (Shaikh, 2020). It was through these connections that D-Company is thought to have come into contact with Al Qaeda, which was at the time building an infrastructure

for its upcoming attack on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Contacts were also allegedly built with Boko Haram in Nigeria (Williams, 2020). Dawood's brother Anis Ibrahim handled heroin smuggling operations to the African continent. Complicity of a top D-Company member in the international drug trade, and suspected links with jihadist terrorism, eventually combined with the political shock caused by 9/11 to bring Dawood under hostile American scrutiny (Nanjappa, 2009 and Raval, 2002). In 2003, the US government declared the fugitive crime lord to be a 'global terrorist'.

The Taliban conquest of Afghanistan (1994-96) led to a surge in heroin production during the late 1990s. Having obtained a new operations base in Karachi with ISI support, D-Company seized control of the ever-expanding flow of drugs passing through Pakistan, which had previously been dominated by local Pashtun gangs. The syndicate used this additional source of revenue to rebuild its networks in Mumbai after 1993 (Raval and Chengappa, 2003). 'Tiger' Memon's smuggling contacts had been scooped up by Indian police, but the sizeable returns from drug trafficking allowed Dawood to suborn a fresh cohort of Indian law enforcement officials (Ray, Unnithan and Tare, 2011). Yet, even as he did so his Karachi-based lieutenants bungled in managing D-Company activities due to a basic lack of operational security.

One of them, a man called 'Chhota' Shakeel ('Little' Shakeel) would telephone subordinates in Mumbai and give them instructions in plain language. A technological illiterate, he did not know that after the 1993 bombings, the city police had upgraded their communications interception capability. Policemen listening in on his conversations

coolly noted down names and addresses of D-Company members in the city. Once, they allegedly had to stifle their laughter when a local gangster hesitantly cautioned Shakeel about speaking so openly on the telephone, only to be reassured that no-one was listening in. This went on for a while before Shakeel noticed that most of the men he spoke to in Mumbai, soon ended up in police custody. He then switched to using email, a new technology in the late 1990s. But true to his limited understanding of electronic surveillance, he used a single email account for all correspondence relating to D-Company. He was unaware that within a short time of his making the switch, the Mumbai police had hacked into his account and were reading these messages as well (Zaidi, 2019: 172-177). The police were gratified that Shakeel was now issuing instructions to D-Company operatives in writing. It saved them the trouble of transcribing his phone conversations.

It seems incongruous that D-Company could acquire tons of military-grade explosive and hundreds of assault rifles from a foreign country, and yet be so casual about tradecraft. The 1993 bombings can be seen as an example of ‘crime-terror convergence’ only if looked at from a distance and with inconvenient details being left unexplained. If closely examined, these details can radically change the nature of the narrative. Rather than a case of organized crime developing a political agenda due to ideological grievances, the events of 12 March 1993 simply represent a case of state sponsored terrorism executed through a criminal proxy.

### **Re-evaluating motives**

As ‘terrorists’ go, the locally-recruited hoodlums who abandoned the firearms-laden van were amateurs. They got spooked by detonations across the city, something which did not happen to the politically-indoctrinated Pakistani jihadists who attacked Mumbai on 26 November 2008. This does not suggest that the December 1992-January 1993 riots played no role in their motivation. But it does lead to the question of why Dawood himself, as the man who orchestrated the carnage from afar, chose to risk patronage networks he had acquired within the Indian political establishment by conducting an act of mass-casualty terrorism.

To answer this question, it is necessary to confront a rather overlooked fact: irrefutable evidence of Dawood’s *personal* involvement in the 1993 bombing conspiracy is weak (Unnithan, 2011). The Indian government’s legal case against ‘Tiger’ Memon is much stronger. A plausible if contrived argument might be made that Dawood, who was away in Dubai, was not aware of local preparations in Mumbai for the bombings. Artful defence lawyers could possibly depict Memon as a hot-headed deputy who had implicated his boss without the latter’s knowledge. There are reasons to believe that Dawood himself may have counted on this reasoning. Following the bombings, he denied knowledge of the conspiracy while laying all blame on ‘Tiger’ Memon (Kumar, 2015). Indian officials do not find such claims credible, partly because the don made no subsequent effort to punish his deputy even after they had both moved to Karachi, as might have been expected if the bombings had been a rogue action. It is possible that from his base in Dubai, Dawood had hoped to play both sides, winning favour with Islamabad while at the same time remaining distant from micro-management of the attack so as to protest innocence to

New Delhi. He had after all, managed just such a balancing act during his years as a rising figure in the Mumbai underworld, being involved in a number of violent activities but staying sufficiently close to those in power as to avoid imprisonment.

Following the 1993 bombings, one of the conspirators who was arrested made a surprising revelation to Indian police. He claimed that Dawood had also arranged for the assassinations of three Hindu politicians, who were affiliated with majoritarian parties. This neatly fit in with the theory that the don had been motivated to seek revenge for Muslim lives lost in the riots that occurred earlier that year. Yet, a possible fourth assassination victim of D-Company was a Muslim legislator from a party that was protective of the minority community (Rahman, 1993 and 'Dawood's men', 1996). The targeting of this individual made no sense, unless it had been Dawood's purpose all along to escalate religious tensions regardless of the harm caused to Indian Muslims.

1993 was the first but not the only time D-Company was linked to terrorism within India. In June 1999, police discovered that the syndicate was storing assault rifles in madrassas (religious schools) for possible use in assassination plots directed at politicians (Baweja, 2000). Here again, Dawood was defying the conventional logic held by academic researchers on the crime-terror convergence that gangsters normally avoid engaging in terrorism because it is bad for business. Instead, the fugitive don seemed to show that if certain conditions are fulfilled, a crime lord might be willing to engage in politically aggressive actions. These conditions were:

- 1) Being physically far removed from the violent consequences of one's decisions,
- 2) Having enough layers of cut-outs to mask the precise origin of a provocative act,

- 3) Projecting oneself as acting in reprisal for the victimization of one's community and
- 4) Being able to trade-in the inevitable loss of some patronage networks for fresh revenue-earning opportunities under a new patron elsewhere.

If all four requirements are met, a mafia boss can opt to confront the state machinery with a view towards signalling their own territorial dominance, popular support and punitive reach. D-Company lost much of its constituency within the Mumbai Muslim community after 1993, but it gained a safe haven in Pakistan which thereafter enabled its expansion into the international heroin trade. By the time the United States government declared Dawood a 'global terrorist' in 2003, he had mainly come to be associated with drug trafficking rather than the original line which he had started out with under Haji Mastan: gold smuggling.

The elimination of customs duty on Indian gold imports in 1992 was sufficiently damaging to D-Company's main source of earnings, that it became susceptible to ISI business overtures which were accompanied by subtle pressure tactics ('ISI pressured Dawood to carry out Mumbai blasts', 2002). According to one credible source, at around the time of the 1992-93 riots Dawood's fleet of gold smuggling vessels 'coincidentally' came under attack by two Pakistan-based crime lords, named Aslam Bhatti and Dawood Jatt. Their compatriot Taufiq Jaliawala, who besides being a personal friend of 'Tiger' Memon also knew Dawood, presented a solution: in exchange for Dawood's cooperation in transporting certain cargo to India, elements in the Pakistani government would

ensure security for D-Company's future operations (Zaidi, 2002: 29). There is little doubt in the minds of Indian officials that the co-optation of D-Company in the 1993 bombings was done by Jaliawala himself and another Pakistani national named Yusuf Godhrawala. Both men were allegedly involved in drug trafficking (Swami, 2010). A third Pakistani man based in Dubai, Syed Arif, is also thought by Indian police to have played a role in co-opting Dawood into the ISI's plans.

After the bombings in Mumbai, Jaliawala and Arif accompanied Dawood as he left Dubai to start a new life as a drug baron in Karachi (Sharma, 2013). During the late 1990s, when D-Company members still spoke candidly with Indian journalists via long-distance telephone conversations from Pakistan, they boasted of the support they received from their hosts. Dawood, according to one Pakistani journalist, was enough of a player in the Karachi crime landscape that local police could not touch him, thanks to the high-level protection he received through the ISI (Hasnain, 2000). His daughter later married the son of a prominent Pakistani cricketer, and the police provided security for the wedding – a fact that was unofficially acknowledged later (Abbas, 2011).

It seems clear that the long-established narrative, of D-Company being provoked by Hindu-Muslim rioting to carry out the 1993 bombings in Mumbai, does not fully explain its behaviour either at the time or since. Failure to explore the ISI's role in 1992 and why successive Pakistani governments have since persisted in denying Dawood's presence in Karachi, is an important contributor to faulty debates about a 'crime-terror convergence'. Instead of a non-state actor operating autonomously from government

control, it may be more helpful to see the 1993 bombings as a case of an organized crime group participating in a covert operation.

In this regard, two final points are pertinent. First, at the time the bombings occurred, Pakistan had been watch-listed by the US government as a possible state sponsor of terrorism. American and European officials claimed to have been monitoring the country's ongoing support for Kashmiri and Sikh separatists in India. Pakistani officials denied the accusations, and claimed that Washington was using the issue of terrorism as indirect leverage to pressure Islamabad into rolling back its nuclear programme. Whatever their motives, the fact remains that by 1993 neutral governments were tacitly endorsing an accusation previously made explicit by New Delhi, of Pakistani covert interference in India's domestic affairs (Rashid, 1993: 27-28).

Second, the 1993 bombings took place while the ISI was being headed by a firebrand general. Dubbed an 'unlikely spymaster' by the Pakistani press, Lieutenant General Javed Nasir was allegedly part of a so-called 'Islamist lobby' within the Pakistani military that saw itself as obliged 'to support jihad whenever and wherever it is waged' (Amir, 1992: 43 and Abbas, 1995: 34-35). Prior to taking up his position at the head of Pakistan's spy agency, Nasir had briefly headed Pakistan's ordnance factory at the military-run cantonment city of Wah, which is located near Islamabad. When the Memon family home was raided by the Mumbai police after the bombings, a carton with the inscription 'Wah Nobel Industries' was seized from the property. Wah Nobel Industries was later found to be a Pakistani firm that manufactured explosives ('CBI implicated Sanjay Dutt in Mumbai blasts', 2001). It was based at the Wah cantonment, which led to

speculation that the RDX used in Mumbai came from the ordnance factory (Unnithan, 2021). Two months later, Nasir was dismissed from his post by the Pakistani civilian government, allegedly in compliance with a written demand from Washington.

Whether the dismissal was in any way connected with the events in Mumbai remains unclear. An article by a retired senior Indian intelligence official has this to say about Nasir:

As ISI chief, Javed Nasir was keen to find ways of supporting Islamic causes worldwide. He set up arrangements to arm and support Bosnian Muslims, in collaboration with Iran. He saw opportunities to hurt India, not only in Kashmir but in other regions as well. He is reported to have established contact with Tamil extremists (LTTE) and set up a gun running operation with links to LTTE in Bangkok. He funded Arakenese Muslims (Rohingiyas)-who inhabit the area bordering Myanmar's frontier with Bangladesh, to help them in their struggle for an independent enclave (Banerji, 2011: 19).

Lest these accusations appear suspect solely on account of their authorship, it must be noted that a war crimes tribunal in The Hague later demanded custody of Nasir to investigate claims that as ISI chief he had defied a United Nations embargo on arms supplies to militants in Bosnia. The demand was rejected by Islamabad (Butt, 2011). Nasir himself stated, through legal documents presented in a Pakistani court in 2002, that his covert intervention in the Bosnian civil war earned the ire of the US government (Cawasjee, 2003). It seems reasonable to assert that at the very least, flush with its perceived success in expelling the Soviet Army from Afghanistan, the ISI in the 1990s was highly active in paramilitary covert operations.

The existing narrative about Mumbai 1993 needs to be weighed against additional information that has since come out about ISI involvement with terrorist entities, including the perpetrators of the 2008 assault on the same city. German author

Hein Kiessling has argued that the 2008 attack could not conceivably have been a ‘rogue operation’ by the rigidly hierarchical ISI, but was very likely approved by the then Pakistani army chief, who coincidentally also was an ex-ISI chief (Kiessling, 2016: 214). Likewise, American scholars who have studied the social networks of jihadist actors in Pakistan point out that the country’s military maintains close ties, sometimes bound by familial relationships at the local level, with militant organizations (Rassler, Fair, Ghosh, Jamal and Shoeb, 2013: 11). Coupled with the growing international consensus that Dawood Ibrahim is located in Pakistan, and Islamabad’s own efforts to block international law enforcement efforts against D-Company, there are strong grounds for suggesting that the 1993 bombings were part of a larger geopolitical design (‘Pakistan tries to block extradition of Dawood’s top aide to US’, 2019). The aim of this design seems to be the employment of militant actors, whether motivated by Islamist causes or by ethnonationalist ones, such as the (now defunct) LTTE, as covert tools of foreign policy.

The existing discourse about D-Company also needs to be measured against evidence offered by American and Pakistani sources that elements of the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment, as well as civilian politicians, were heavily complicit in heroin trafficking through the 1990s. For reasons connected with bureaucratic interests and narrow geopolitical calculations, knowledge of the ISI’s role in facilitating both terrorism and drug trafficking was suppressed during the Soviet-Afghan War and to some extent even afterwards (Hartman, 2002: 482 and McCoy, 2010). The result was that international academic debates were stunted towards

viewing D-Company as a ‘non state actor’ rather than a transnational entity operating under state protection. Seen against this background, the 1993 bombings represent not so much an act of political vengeance for Hindu-Muslim rioting, although that might well have been the motivation of those who physically planted the bombs. Rather, from the perspective of senior managers within D-Company who planned, funded and organized the coordinated terrorist attack that shook India on Friday 12 March 1993, it was part of adapting their existing business model to cope with new market forces and build relationships with a new set of patrons. In short, it was ‘just business’ for Dawood Ibrahim and for those who would later host him.

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