

**Interview with Professor Sumantra Bose discussing the impact of the Mumbai terror attacks and asks the question, 'Is this India's 9\11?'**

**Government Department, LSE**

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00.00

**Justin Gest:**

Welcome to the hotseat, I'm Justin Gest, a doctoral student here in the Government Department. With us today on the hotseat is Professor Sumantra Bose, and we will be discussing what has been dubbed as "India's 9/11" - and no doubt a transformational moment in the history of that country and the region. Welcome Professor Bose, thanks for being here.

For our first question, how do you think this transforms India's relationship, an already very complicated relationship, with Pakistan?

00:28

**Sumatra Bose:**

Well it doesn't transform India's relationship with Pakistan; India and Pakistan have had a troubled relationship for the last 61 years. What it does throw into some jeopardy is the relative thaw in the India-Pakistan relationship that we have been experiencing in the region for the last four years or so. Now the thaw didn't really lead to a peace process between the two countries but it raised some hopes that relations could be normalised in a lasting way, and especially that progress could be made on sorting out the Kashmir dispute. Now that prospect looks rather distant, if not oblique now, because it does appear that members of a group, a radical Islamist group based in Pakistan, are responsible for planning and perpetrating the attacks in Mumbai.

01:29

**JG:**

And how does this transform India's relationship with its Muslim population inside the country?

01:36

**SB:**

That's a good question. India of course has a long history of what we call communal violence. The word communal means inter-religious violence - you know between Hindus and Muslims. Of course, India is characterised by violence between other groups as well, for example inter-caste violence or inter-ethnic violence. But communal violence, meaning inter-religious violence between Hindus and Muslims, has unfortunately reoccurred many times in India over the past six decades, including in the

past decade and a half or so. The good news is that it looks very unlikely that there will be a backlash against India's Muslim minority because of these attacks, partly because it looks likely as I already mentioned that the planners and the perpetrators came from outside the country, and so far the Indian investigation into the attacks hasn't really uncovered any significant local collaboration. Of course it can't be ruled out that there was some local collaboration involved but so far there is no evidence at all of any significant collusion by Indians Muslims in these attacks, and for that reason there is unlikely to be a backlash against the Indian Muslim community.

03:01

**JG:**

Now after similar attacks elsewhere we've seen an increase in security. How will this affect the securitisation of the Indian state?

03:08

**SB:**

Well the securitisation of the Indian state has been a reality of life for a long time now. Well I can speak of the 1980s when I came of age - I was growing up in India, going to school there - and I remember that throughout the 1980s and extending into the early 1990s, there was a very serious national security problem because of a Sikh insurgency in the northern province of the Punjab, which eventually petered out in the early 1990s, but that led to securitisation of the state as you call it. Then of course from 1990 onwards, an insurgency broke out in Indian administered Kashmir, and the point I've made in a commentary I've written on the BBC website about the Mumbai attacks, is that India has a long history of terrorist attacks of this type. India's cities have been targeted before; the difference being that most of the previous attacks have involved bombs being planted in markets in Delhi or on the commuter train network in Bombay, and the novelty this time around is the use of frontal assault tactics. To go back to your question, obviously there's going to be a ratcheting up of security on a day to day basis. I'm flying to India tomorrow, and I'm not looking forward to that - I won't be able to go to a shopping mall, or to a hotel to have a meal, without being thoroughly checked out. But as Americans would realise, for example, after 9/11 there was no alternative to that sort of security, so people tend to be rather good-natured about it on the whole, because there's just no alternative to it.

05:02

**JG:**

So if we zoom out here and we look at the broader, regional perspective, how does this transform relationships within South Asia?

05:11

**SB:**

Well the problems in the region are all inter-connected, although in complex ways. Clearly the conflict in Afghanistan has reached a critical state, and much of that conflict has roots in and connections with the situation in Pakistan, particularly in the north-west frontier province and in the so-called federally administered tribal areas. There is

of course also the festering dispute over Kashmir, and then there are the internal situations of India and Pakistan. I would not entirely leave out Iran either; Iran is mostly in the news because of the Iran-US face-off, the Iran-Israel face-off over Iran's nuclear programme and all of that, but a part of the instability in Pakistan has been spilling over into a bordering region of south-eastern Iran, known as Iranian Baluchistan, where there's a radical Sunni militant group active, which has been causing a considerable headache for the Iranian authorities. So all these pieces are interconnected - its going to be an enormous challenge for the incoming Obama administration. What is clearly required is a greater and more effective degree of interstate cooperation in tackling this menace of terrorism.

Clearly there's no alternative but to take the harshest possible measures against the elements who plotted and perpetrated the Mumbai attacks; these are people whose behaviour is frankly inexcusable. However there are certain political issues in the region which need to be dealt with in a sophisticated and calibrated way, where a militant approach won't entirely suffice. For example there's this long running and festering dispute in and over Kashmir, which requires a peace process leading to a political settlement. The group that is the prime suspect in the Mumbai attacks, the Lashkar-e-Toiba, the Pakistan-based radical Islamist group, in fact cut its teeth over the past decade or so fighting Indian security forces in Kashmir. It's a pan-Islamist group but Kashmir is its pet cause. So the long term way of isolating groups of this nature is to address political problems through a political strategy and approach. There is also a genuine problem in Afghanistan which can't simply be reduced to Al-Qaida or even the more extreme elements of the Taliban movement. A lot of Afghans, particularly the Patan Pashtun Afghans, who are the plurality ethnicity in Afghanistan are genuinely outraged by the increasing presence of foreign troops in their territory. Put yourself in their place; I'm Indian, you're American, our colleagues who are filming us are British - well one of them is British, another is American: but whether we are American or British or Indian, none of us would like foreign troops to be around on the soil of our country, so put yourself in their position. So that is an issue. Its true that the Obama administration is looking to ratchet up the American military presence in Afghanistan, and yes, there's a strong short-term case for that; but ultimately, the understandable grievance of a large section of the Afghan people about this mounting foreign military presence in their territory has to be addressed.

09:06

**JG:**

So going back to the possibility of inter-state relationships here and cooperation, what is the likelihood that that will actually take place?

09:13

**SB:**

One silver lining in the dark cloud of the Mumbai attacks is that it is very unlikely that the Mumbai attacks, horrific as they are, will lead to a recurrence of the Indian-Pakistan military standoff of 2002, which threatened to escalate into a full-scale crisis. Clearly, there is a strong case for more concerted, more effective cooperation between the governmental and security authorities of India and Pakistan in tackling this menace. This is not to say that all of the elements in the Pakistani ISI for example, the notorious inter-services intelligence, can be trusted, but clearly there is a certain shared ground between the moderate middle-ground in Pakistan, and the Indian authorities in tackling

a cross-border menace of this nature, and of course the United States has a role to play in that because it has direct leverage with Pakistan and significant influence with the Indian government. In fact the United States has already been playing a beneficial and constructive role; unlike in 2002, when Washington took time to get its crisis diplomacy together, this time they've acted quite quickly and Condoleezza Rice's visit to both capitals, particularly Delhi but also Islamabad last week, is a case in point.

10:46

**JB:**

Alright, very good, thank you very much for being with us, Professor Bose, Professor Sumantra Bose, here with us on today's hot seat. You can read more from him actually on the BBC website as he mentioned in the interview and we should have it linked on the press office website of the LSE. Until next time, thanks very much for joining us on the LSE hot seat, we'll see you next month.