

The Red Fort Blast—Renewed Lessons for India’s Urban Security and Counterterror Response

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Introduction

The evening rush hour blast outside Delhi’s Red Fort on 10 Nov 2025 has jolted India’s sense of urban security and revealed the tenacious adaptability of terror networks. The attack is unlikely to be an isolated relapse but a broader continuum of India’s three-decade-long fight against terrorism. It is also a reminder that terrorism mutates continually, adjusting its methods to bypass defences and exploit psychological vulnerabilities. Even though 13 lives were lost in the attack and over 30 injured, the disturbing cost lies in what the incident exposes—the re-emergence of organised terror in Indian cities, cross-border orchestration, and the alarming spread of radicalisation into professional spaces.

The explosion which ripped close to one of India’s most symbolic landmarks reveals three key facts. First, involvement of educated professionals showing the spread of radicalisation among white-collar groups. Second, the seizure of large quantities of ammonium nitrate and other explosives points to a wider and coordinated network planning multiple strikes. Third, the use of a sophisticated ammonium nitrate and RDX indicate newer forms of explosives being used to manufacture improvised explosive devices. Multi-agency teams are using advanced forensic and digital tools to trace the plotters and their links.

Initial Findings

On 27 Oct, posters supporting Jaish-e-Mohammed emerged in Srinagar. The CCTV footage led the police to Dr Adil Ahmed Rather, a doctor who hailed from Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and was working at a private hospital in Saharanpur. An assault rifle was recovered during the search of his old locker at Government Medical College Anantnag. Further interrogation exposed another associate, Dr Mujammil Shakeel, who worked at Al-Falah Hospital, Faridabad. The police recovered 350 kgs of

ammonium nitrate, 20 timers, and another assault rifle from him. Authorities believe that this was part of a major terror plot targeting Delhi-National Capital Region, exposing how radicalised professionals were deeply entrenched in the conspiracy.

The investigation has been handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) after the blast in Delhi. Initial findings suggest that Dr Umar Nabi, a Pulwama-based doctor teaching at Al-Falah University, was the sole occupant of the car that exploded near the Red Fort. Officials also believe the blast was premature, which triggered as Nabi acted hastily under pressure of ongoing police raids that had already led to two arrests. Investigations hint that the explosion was caused by a mixture of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil, possibly combined with RDX or a similar high-grade explosive.¹ The blast was powerful enough to overturn cars, shatter glass facades, and reignite old memories of the 2008 serial blasts that had claimed dozens of lives in Delhi.

The J&K, Police already conducting a 20-day probe linked to Jaish-e-Mohammad and another Pakistan-backed outfit, also arrested Dr Shaheen Saeed on 11 Nov from. This brought total arrests in the 'White-collar Terror Module' case to eight, with about 20 others still under questioning.

Forensic experts from the Delhi Forensic Laboratory, working with the NIA and Delhi Police, have confirmed the use of a chemically stable and sophisticated compound, indicating meticulous planning and testing. The car that exploded had changed hands multiple times over recent weeks, a fact that points to careful concealment and premeditated logistics.

Disturbing Trend of Radicalisation of Professionals

Among the most striking disclosures from the ongoing probe is the alleged involvement of medical professionals in the conspiracy. Investigators are focusing on Al-Falah University and its 76-acre campus in Dhauj, Faridabad, suspected of being the hub for radicalised professionals.² The private university, which was established in 1997 as an engineering

college and was granted university status in 2014, also houses Al-Falah Medical College, with which several of the accused are associated. The investigators are of the opinion that Pakistan-based handlers exploited the institution's network to recruit and shelter individuals for coordinated terror activities. The trend of 'White-collar Radicalisation' though perturbing is not unprecedented. It echoes the pattern of early 2000s when the Indian Mujahideen's operational cells were led by educated professionals, obscuring the line between social mobility and extremist ideology.

Such developments defy traditional conventions that education inoculates individuals against indoctrination. Instead, radicalisation has evolved with education, providing more options to propagate the ideology. It has infiltrated digital and professional ecosystems where ideological mentoring often goes unnoticed, until it manifests in terrorism.

Enlarging Web of Conspiracy

Parallel police raids in multiple states have yielded over 3,000 kgs of ammonium nitrate and several caches of detonators and fuses. Investigators believe that the Red Fort explosion may have been the first in a series of planned attacks aimed at striking multiple urban centres. The key suspect Dr Muzammil has divulged that he and Dr Nabi had conducted a reconnaissance of the Red Fort before the explosion. Interrogations and phone data also reveal plans for a 26 Jan attack at the same site, and a probable Diwali strike that was later aborted.³

Pro-Jaish and other radical propaganda material recovered from Faridabad and Sonipat have led to suspicions that the attackers were part of a revived cross-border network exploiting online radicalisation channels. The NIA is examining encrypted communications between handlers across the border and Indian operatives who may have been acting under the guise of legitimate professionals.

Urban Terrorism and Strategic Messaging

The emblematic choice of target also seemed to be intentional. The heritage Red Fort, which hosts India's Independence Day celebrations,

represents the heart of Indian sovereignty. By attacking it, terrorists aimed at physical destruction and psychological destabilisation.⁴ The terror-group functioned through encrypted channels for indoctrination, coordination, funding, and logistics. Reports have revealed that money was raised via professional and academic networks, often disguised as charitable initiatives. The accused were involved in recruiting and radicalising individuals, as well as raising funds, procuring arms, and amassing explosives for planned terror attacks.⁵

The attack and conspiracy seem to be a part of a strategic playbook of asymmetric warfare, where the purpose is to generate public fear, stress security systems, and project the illusion of state vulnerability. At times, due to years of relative calm, complacency too creeps into urban vigilance mechanisms, often aided by a sense of comfort of past successes in counterterrorism.

Forensic Science and New Battlefield

Another significant feature of modern-day counterterrorism is how forensic science now plays a vital role in unravelling the conspiracies. Forensic investigations today are interdisciplinary, aided by Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven databases and real-time digital tracking that enhance accuracy and shorten response timelines. Experts from multiple forensic divisions like chemical analysis, ballistics, DNA profiling, and cyber are working in tandem with the blast investigators to reconstruct the event.⁶ From residue analysis to blast pattern mapping, each fragment tells a story. By identifying chemical signatures, fuse types, and trigger mechanisms, investigators are now defining the nature of the explosive as well as tracing its origin and movement across states.

This scientific integration ensures that counterterrorism is no longer confined to field intelligence or interrogation alone. It now hinges equally on data, evidence, and laboratory precision.

Political and Psychological Dimension

The Red Fort attack is not just an offensive on security but a test of political messaging and resilience. It emphasises that India's urban counterterror architecture must keep evolving with a layered strategy combining predictive analytics and AI-assisted surveillance, integrated inter-agency databases and community-level vigilance networks to identify early signs of radicalisation.

In the immediate aftermath, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasised restraint, coordination, and calm. Such balanced signalling is essential as it denies terrorists the space and mileage and counters their propaganda narratives. Diplomatically, the incident will reignite calls for accountability of cross-border terror sponsors. Strategically, India must further strengthen its intelligence fusion, cyber monitoring, and diplomatic outreach to counter proxy warfare being waged through hybrid tactics.

Conclusion

The Red Fort blast is a reminder that no counterterrorism system is failproof and the new challenge often emerges in unexpected forms. India's response capacity, encompassing scientific, strategic, and social, has matured significantly. The key lies in sustaining that momentum by regularly updating urban security protocols, enforcing multi-agency coordination, investing in forensic and cyber capabilities, and strengthening societal resilience against polarisation and propaganda.

Endnotes

¹ The Hindu Bureau, "Delhi blast Updates: Centre describes explosion in Delhi as 'terrorist incident', promises justice", *The Hindu*, 13 Nov 2025, accessed 18 Nov 2025, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/delhi-red-fort-car-blast-nia-probe-jammu-kashmir-terror-module-police-live-updates-november-12/article70269640.ece>

² TOI Editorial, "Plot Thickens", *The Times of India*, 12 Nov 2025, accessed 19 Nov 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/toi-editorials/plot-thickens/>

³ Mukesh Singh Sengar, "Delhi Blast Suspects Planned Diwali Attack, Aborted It Later: Sources", *NDTV*, 12 Nov 2025, accessed 18 Nov 2025, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/delhi-blast-suspects-recced-red-fort-planned-to-strike-on-republic-day-say-sources-9619438>

⁴ Ajai Sahni, "Warnings from Red Fort", *The Times of India*, 12 Nov 2025, accessed 19 Nov 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/toi-plus/defence-security/warnings-from-red-fort/articleshow/125253131.cms>

⁵ Sengar, "Delhi Blast Suspects Planned Diwali Attack"

⁶ Shamim Haque Mondal, "What do forensic experts do after blasts", *The Hindu*, 12 Nov 2025, accessed 18 Nov 2025, <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/what-do-forensic-experts-do-after-blasts-explained/article70268515.ece>

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