

Terror on Minsk underground

OKTYABRSKAYA IS ONE OF THE busiest stations in the Minsk underground system. Linking the city's two metro lines, it lies about 100 metres from the President Alexander Lukashenko's main office and residence. The bomb exploded next to the second carriage of the train, close to the interchange exit.

Belarusian authorities claimed almost immediately that this was a terrorist attack. According to the intelligence service, the bomb was about five kilos of TNT equivalent. It was packed with 80 x 8mm nails and 15mm ball bearings and was operated via radio remote control. The device was packed in a large suitcase and was left under a bench on a platform.

The country's State Security Agency – KGB – considered three possible motives: To destabilise the country; revenge by extremist organisations; or an act perpetrated by a mentally ill or unstable person.

Law enforcement agencies launched a massive check on people who might have been in possession of the relevant ordnance, owing to their professional activities, or those involved in volunteer exploratory teams who search for ammunition (Belarus was littered with ammunition after World War II and the authorities say some people still trade in this ordnance today).

Counter-terrorist experts from Russia, Israel and the UK offered their assistance immediately. Seven counter-terrorist experts from Israel arrived in Minsk on April 13 and joined the local investigation team. Russian counter-terrorist officers from the Federal Security Service (FSB) had arrived the previous day. The investigation team was strengthened by a group of experienced criminologists and investigators from the Russian Central Investigation Committee.

EMERCOM of Russia sent a group of ten psychologists to Minsk to help with counselling for relatives, survivors and witnesses. They supported psychologists from Belarus at three hospitals in Minsk and a hotline call centre. Thanks to the historical and cultural links between the two countries, one of the main features enabling such assistance is that Belarusian people are mostly bilingual (Belarus-Russian) or even Russian-only speakers.

The treatment of victims has been lengthy. At the time of writing there are still people

On April 11, 2011, at 17:55hrs local time (15:55hrs GMT) an explosion at Oktyabrskaya (October) station on the Minsk underground in Belarus took the lives of 15 people and wounded about 200 others, says **Lina Kolesnikova**



Fifteen people were killed and 200 others were wounded in a blast that struck a metro station in Minsk. The authorities said the blast was a terrorist attack. President Lukashenko called the blast a "serious provocation" against the authorities

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in hospital – 26 of them seriously wounded and 33 in a less serious condition.

The Government of Belarus promised direct financial aid to victims and their relatives.

On April 13, five people, including a woman, were arrested by the Belarus special forces group Almaz; two were charged with terrorism. All five are below 30; all are citizens of Belarus, have no previous criminal records and are from blue-collar backgrounds.

Should they be found guilty at their trial, detainees could face the death penalty (execution by firing squad).

One of the suspects was also charged with attacks on September 14 and 22 in Vitebsk (in the eastern part of the country). He was also accused of perpetrating the attack on Independence Day – July 3, 2008 – in Minsk, when 50 people were injured. This latter attack was classified by authorities as an ‘act of hooliganism’ and those responsible were not found.

After the 2008 attack, officials in Belarus took unprecedented measures that were not widely advertised – all men in Belarus had to undergo fingerprint registration. However, the accused had managed to evade this process.

During a press conference after the April bombings the General Prosecution Office released selected parts of CCTV recordings said to show the alleged perpetrator at

off and help set up his own business. The deputy prosecutor of Belarus, Andrey Shved, said both the accused knew each other from their school days, and lived in the same neighbourhood. He also claimed that the reasons for their acts lie in: “Their way of life and attitude to life.”

Additionally, investigators said that the suspected perpetrator and his accomplice had undergone psychiatric evaluation; they were both found to be sane but, according to psychiatrists, one of them was diagnosed as having a ‘sadistic’ outlook.

Crosshead

In the aftermath of the attack, President Alexander Lukashenko gave his own, unconventional, point of view on the reasons behind this attack: “It is a result of the sickening influence of democracy. On the eve of elections we have become so democratic, that it made you and me giddy,” he said. “There was so much democracy, it was just nauseating!”

He accused the Internet of being a: “Main explosives expert” and promised additional punitive and controlling sanctions against the worldwide web.

It is worth mentioning that access to the Internet in Belarus is only allowed upon passport data control, so authorities have full control of each person’s activity online. Moreover, access from Belarus to many sites

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Oktyabrskaya station. The footage shows a man arriving at the station with a large suitcase; he is seen placing it under the bench. Then he is shown moving upstairs without the bag. At one point, he turns back towards the train platform downstairs. The bomb went off when people were getting out of the train.

Authorities claimed that three explosive devices were found at the homes of the suspects. Two of them confessed to plotting future attacks, targeting a train, a bus stop and a bus. One was said to have admitted that he had used information from the Internet to research explosives.

Whether this group had someone behind it is unclear. Neither are the motives for the attack. In an interview with the media, friends of one of the suspects confirmed that he had dropped hints just before the events, saying that he would become rich soon and was to receive money from unnamed sources that would pay his debts

is already fully prohibited and/or blocked.

In a move to punish those people whose negligence it considered had allowed the alleged terrorists to fulfill this attack, the Belarusian Government surpassed itself. The management of Minsk underground and the director of the factory, where one of the arrested persons used to work, were fired. The latter was accused of insufficient watchfulness over the moral attitudes of workers at the factory. An investigation blamed a police officer for the lack of fingerprints of the accused terrorist; the officer was arrested, as was another officer **CRJ**

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