

**Opening Statement of Shri P. Chidambaram
Home Minister
on
January 6, 2009
at the
Conference of Chief Ministers on Internal Security**

On behalf of the Government of India and my own behalf, I wish you a very happy New Year and welcome you to this meeting on the challenge of terrorism. I am grateful to the Chief Ministers and their colleagues and senior officers for their gracious presence at this meeting. I am reassured that your Governments share the Central Government's assessment of the gravity of the situation. Many Chief Ministers have written to me outlining the several steps that they have taken in the last year and, in particular, the last month. On our part, I assure you that the Government of India will work with you closely in the joint effort to wipe out the scourge of terrorism.

2. Ordinarily, a meeting of this kind would have a broader agenda. Even if the meeting had been called to discuss the subject of violence alone, you would have expected the discussion to embrace all kinds of violence – terrorist-induced violence, left-wing extremism and violence caused by Indian insurgent groups. However, there is a compelling reason to depart from the usual agenda. Terrorism was, and is, the issue upper most in the minds of the people. Mumbai was the tipping point. You have heard the anguished voices of the people of India. You have heard the cry for justice from those who have lost their loved ones and those who find themselves tending to the injured. You have heard the universal demand that our response to terror and terrorist threats should be strong, swift and decisive.

3. We represent elected Governments. The executive, more than the other branches of the State, and more than any other agency of Government, is ultimately responsible to the people. In the States, the buck stops at the desk of the Chief Minister. Hence, we have called this meeting of Chief Ministers to apply our minds to the sole issue of terrorism. I am confident that your wise counsel and valuable suggestions will help us evolve a coherent policy and a coordinated response to the challenge of terrorism.

4. Terrorist attacks have exacted a heavy toll of lives and left many hundreds injured. There are also other consequences, notably fear. Fear saps the energy of the nation. The security of the people ranks above any other consideration. Liberty and equality have meaning only if there is security.

5. 36 days into this office, I am more convinced than ever before that we have to set for ourselves two goals:

- First, to raise the level of preparedness to meet the increasingly sophisticated terrorist threats.
- Second, to enhance the speed and decisiveness of the response to a terrorist threat or a terrorist attack.

Further, we have to achieve the twin objectives in a relatively short period of time.

6. Let me deal first with the level of preparedness. The key to raising the level of preparedness is gathering and sharing intelligence. One of the first tasks that I undertook was to re-establish and empower the Multi Agency Centre created in 2001 to deal with all matters concerning intelligence pertaining to terrorism. As you are aware, beginning January 1, 2009, the Multi Agency Centre has begun to function on a 24x7 basis and is now legally obliged to share intelligence with all other agencies, including agencies of the Governments of the States and Union Territories. A copy of the executive order outlining the functions, powers and duties of the Multi Agency Centre is contained in your folder.

7. Having established MAC, the next question is what are the sources of intelligence? Intelligence is gathered by a number of agencies – some are located within the defence forces, some are at the borders, and many are in different parts of India. They rely on both human intelligence and technical intelligence. Their contribution is valuable. Nevertheless, I wish to say that the best source of intelligence still remains the local police station and friends of the local police. As seasoned administrators, you will agree with me that nothing of consequence can happen within the jurisdiction of a police station without the knowledge of the Station House Officer. The local police station is the best source of intelligence. All of us recognize this fact, but I regret to draw your attention to another fact, namely, that the vacancies as on August 31, 2007 were constables:1,13,779; sub-inspectors:18,654; and DySPs:2,099. I sincerely hope that the position has improved since August 2007. Keeping the local police station at the centre of the intelligence gathering machinery, we must find a way in which that intelligence can be made to flow seamlessly – and in real time – to the District Headquarters, State capital and the national capital. Equally, in the reverse direction, intelligence must flow from the national capital to the State capital, the District Headquarters and the local police station. Many State Governments have already taken up plans to provide such connectivity. My offer to you today is that we are willing to work with you in order to establish this connectivity so that gathering and sharing intelligence on a real time basis is accomplished as early as possible.

8. On your part, I would urge you to kindly strengthen the intelligence gathering function of the police station. There must be at least one person of the rank of Head Constable or an Assistant Sub-Inspector who is exclusively charged with this responsibility – and is burdened with no other work. Besides, the Special Branch must be strengthened and adequate number of Special Branch personnel must be posted in the districts and major towns. Under the Modernisation of Police Forces Scheme, there is a component to enhance the capacity of the Special Branch of the State police, and I would request you to implement the agreed plans expeditiously. I draw your kind attention to a paper in your folder which contains an outline of a proposal to strengthen the Special Branch in your State. I request you to examine the paper carefully and let us have your views and suggestions.

9. Our second goal should be to enhance the speed and decisiveness of the response mechanism to terrorist threats or terrorist attacks. This requires specially trained police personnel and advanced equipment. The Central Government proposes to set up hubs of the National Security Guard in different parts of the country. To begin with, hubs will be set up in four cities. Some other cities will be covered by a trained anti-terrorist force provided by the defence forces – for example, Bengaluru will be covered by the Army. In course of time, NSG hubs will be set up in more centres. I would urge State Governments to complement this effort by raising and deploying their own anti-terrorist forces. The Central Government offers to help the States in raising and training the anti-terrorist forces in each State.

10. The speed and decisiveness of the response mechanism would also depend upon the equipment that is provided to the anti-terrorist force. Hence, it is important to invest in the latest equipment and technology. The Central Government offers to advise you and assist you in this regard. It would also be necessary to put in place a clear command structure in the case of a terrorist threat or a terrorist attack. There must be no ambiguity or confusion about who is in-charge; who will have overall authority over the different forces; who will deploy the forces according to the needs of the situation; and who will be held accountable for the success of the operation. All these aspects must be spelt out clearly and made known to the State police department as well as the other forces that may be requisitioned in the case of a terrorist threat or a terrorist attack.

11. Our response to terrorism cannot be reactive. There is ample evidence that many terrorist modules have burrowed their way into the country. There are also many sleeper cells. We must adopt a proactive approach to apprehend these people and thwart any possible terrorist threat. In this regard too, the key is gathering and sharing intelligence and responding in a coordinated manner to apprehend the potential terrorist.

12. While the agenda before you is quite long, I have dwelt only on a few matters which I thought deserve to be highlighted. The other items on the agenda are equally important and I am sure you will deal with many of them in your remarks. I look forward to listening to your comments and views and, at the end, I hope to make a sincere effort to forge a common approach to the challenge posed by terrorism.

13. Once again, I welcome you to this important meeting at the beginning of the year. I shall now request the Honourable Prime Minister to inaugurate this conference.