**12 die in Indian parliament attack**

A suicide squad stormed India's parliament complex on Thursday, killing seven people before dying themselves in an unprecedented attack on the seat of power of the world's biggest democracy.

Witnesses said five people stormed the parliament, leaping from a car and attacking security guards after apparently driving into the complex using a fake pass.

One of the intruders blew himself up at the main entrance to the parliament chambers.

"I heard a cracker-like sound near the entrance, then I saw people running helter-skelter," Kharbala Sain, a member of parliament, said outside the grand sandstone parliament, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens under British colonial rule.

"I saw many people firing at the same time. I couldn't make out who was who. I couldn't understand who the terrorists were and who the police were," said the MP.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the assault. One of the attackers died when he detonated explosives strapped to his waist. The four others, who also hurled grenades, died in a gun battle with police.

No ministers or legislators were hurt in the attack, which began about 11:45am local time. The Indian prime minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was not in the complex at the time, went on television to say that India's battle against terrorism had reached its final stage, while his defence and interior ministers vowed a tough response.

The home (interior) minister, LK Advani, said: "We will liquidate the terrorists and their sponsors whoever they are, wherever they are." Initial speculation turned to Islamist militants fighting Indian rule in the state of Jammu and [Kashmir](http://www.theguardian.com/world/kashmir), where 38 people died in a suicide attack on the state assembly two months ago.

If confirmed, it would raise tensions with Pakistan, accused by New Delhi of sponsoring Kashmiri militancy. President Pervez Musharraf of [Pakistan](http://www.theguardian.com/world/pakistan) quickly condemned the attack and sent a message of sympathy to Mr Vajpayee.

A terrorism expert, retired major general Afsir Karim, said: "The techniques used by the terrorists would seem to suggest they were trained in Pakistan. We have seen these kind of attacks in Jammu and Kashmir in the past."

Bomb blasts also rocked Kashmir near the border with Pakistan yesterday but there were no casualties or damage. An attack on a paramilitary camp by separatist guerrillas in the Kashmir township of Tral was also foiled.

"I can only imagine how horrifying it would have been if the suicide squad... had succeeded in its objective," Mr Advani said. "It seems their objective was somehow to get inside Parliament House, fully armed with their AK-47s and grenades, while parliament was in session and all the members of the Indian government, all the members of parliament, including the political leaders of the country, were inside."

A Kashmiri guerrilla alliance, the Muthida Jihad Council in the Pakistan-ruled part of Kashmir, said it had no connection with the attack.

Mr Vajpayee said [India](http://www.theguardian.com/world/india) had been fighting terrorism for two decades. "The fight has now reached a decisive stage."

Political analysts said that if the raid turned out to be by Kashmir separatists, India could launch a counter-attack across the line of control into Pakistani-held territory.

"If it turns out that any organisation having links with Pakistan is responsible, then there is going to be a very serious deterioration in relations with Pakistan at the very least," said analyst Mahesh Rangarajan.

Some members of parliament did not want to wait for a claim of responsibility before taking action. "The government should do what America has done in Afghanistan and what Israel is doing in Palestine. The government should not shy away from attacking Pakistan, if involvement is proved," Srichand Kripalani, of the ruling Bharatiya Janata party, said.

Jack Straw, the foreign secretary, said he was appalled by the attack. "I unreservedly condemn those responsible for this attack on the heart of Indian democracy."

Sikh separatists assassinated prime minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. A Tamil suicide bomber killed her son, Rajiv, who also served as a prime minister, in 1991.