**Pakistani Militant Leader Tied to 2008 Mumbai Attacks Is Freed on Bail**

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — In a move that drew furious condemnation from [India](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/india/index.html?inline=nyt-geo), a Pakistani high court released on bail on Friday a militant commander accused of orchestrating the 2008 attacks in Mumbai that killed more than 160 people.

The commander, Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, and six other members of the [Lashkar-e-Taiba](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/l/lashkaretaiba/index.html?inline=nyt-org) militant group have been on trial since 2009 at a high-security jail in Rawalpindi, just south of Islamabad, on charges of participating in [the Mumbai operation](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/30/world/asia/30mumbai.html).

But the trial has been conducted largely in secrecy, and its halting pace has given rise to speculation that its progress is being influenced by the vagaries of wider tensions between [Pakistan](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/pakistan/index.html?inline=nyt-geo) and India.

Those tensions have been particularly high since last spring and summer, when Narendra Modi, a right-wing Hindu leader, [became prime minister of India](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/world/asia/india-prime-minister-narendra-modi-swearing-in-ceremony.html) and there was a marked escalation in violent clashes between the two countries’ troops near the Line of Control in the disputed region of Kashmir.

Mr. Modi protested loudly in December when a Pakistani court ruled that Mr. Lakhvi [should be released on bail](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/19/world/asia/pakistan-grants-bail-to-key-suspect-in-2008-mumbai-attacks.html), even though the Pakistani government, led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, managed to prevent his release at the time by invoking a colonial-era public order act.

But those efforts collapsed when the high court ordered Mr. Lakhvi’s immediate release on bail, saying there was no reason to hold him in jail and provoking a swift response from Indian officials.

Mr. Lakhvi’s release was “a most negative development insofar as bilateral ties are concerned,” Syed Akbaruddin, a spokesman for India’s ministry of external affairs, told reporters in New Delhi. India’s high commissioner to [Pakistan](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/pakistan/index.html?inline=nyt-geo) contacted the Pakistani authorities to register his “strong concerns,” Mr. Akbaruddin added.

“He underlined that this has reinforced the perception that [Pakistan](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/pakistan/index.html?inline=nyt-geo) has a dual policy on dealing with terrorists, and those who have carried out attacks or are posing a threat to India are being dealt with differently,” Mr. Akbaruddin said.

Tasnim Aslam, a spokeswoman for Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told reporters that it would “not be proper to cast aspersions on Pakistan’s commitment to countering terrorism” when the country is pressing the fight against Taliban militants inside its own borders.

Ms. Aslam blamed an “inordinate delay” in Indian cooperation with the Mumbai trial for weakening the prosecution’s case.

Pakistani analysts said it was not clear whether the military or other elements of the security apparatus had influenced the court’s decision on Thursday. What seemed more certain, several said, was that the military did not wish to see Mr. Lakhvi or his group aggressively prosecuted.

“His release has been inevitable for a while now,” said Cyril Almeida, an editor at the newspaper Dawn. “The state is simply not interested in pursuing the Mumbai-related trials.”

It was not immediately clear where Mr. Lakhvi went after he walked free from the Adiala jail around 1 p.m. on Friday.

Mr. Lakhvi’s lawyer, Raja Rizwan Abbasi, said that he was probably staying with his family. “Any further detention order would be illegal and in contempt of court,” he said.

The six other suspects remained in the Adiala jail.

India says that Mr. Lakhvi, widely considered to be the operational head of Lashkar-e-Taiba, coordinated the November 2008 Mumbai attacks by phone from a base in Pakistan. He was [arrested](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/09/world/asia/09pstan.html) the next month.

In December 2014, a Pakistani Taliban [assault](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/17/world/asia/taliban-attack-pakistani-school.html) on an army-run school in Peshawar killed 150 people, most of them children, and led to a concerted [military crackdown](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/20/world/asia/pakistan-school-militants.html) on certain militant groups.

Army special forces troops intensified operations in the country’s tribal belt, and Mr. Sharif’s government [lifted a moratorium](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/23/world/asia/pakistani-premier-calls-for-fast-tracking-executions-of-militants.html) on executions of militant prisoners. Parliament authorized the army to try those prisoners [in special courts](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/25/world/pakistani-premier-announces-military-courts-for-terrorism-cases.html), which have sweeping powers and recently heard their first cases.

But the crackdown has largely avoided groups, like Lashkar-e-Taiba, that share the military’s stance toward India.

Lashkar fighters have infiltrated Indian-controlled Kashmir and attacked Indian diplomatic targets in Afghanistan, moves that are widely believed to have been supported by Pakistani intelligence.

Although Lashkar was officially banned in 2002, it [continues to operate](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/29/world/in-pakistan-a-charity-project-points-to-official-tolerance-of-militants.html) unofficially through Jamaat ud-Dawa, its charity wing, which is based in the eastern city of Lahore but has branches across the country.

The charity’s leader, Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, lives in a Lahore suburb with police protection, free to move about the country making speeches, fund-raising and appearing on television. His supporters have openly mocked a $10 million United States government reward offered for information leading to his prosecution.

In his latest public appearance, on Thursday, Mr. Saeed led a rally in Islamabad, the capital, at which he urged Mr. Sharif’s government to [ally with Saudi Arabia](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/11/world/asia/pakistan-yemen-iran.html) in attacking Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Lashkar’s fighters follow the Ahle Hadith school of Islam, which is closely related to the Wahhabism of Saudi Arabia and has helped the group raise money in the Persian Gulf countries. In the past year, its charity wing has expanded its operations to southern Pakistan, raising fears about the government’s failure to check the spread of extremism.

“For India, the signal is clear,” said Mr. Almeida, the newspaper editor. “Kashmir is central to everything, and Pakistan won’t let India forget that, even if Prime Minister Modi doesn’t want to talk to us.”