TEMPLE CARNAGE Terrorist Attack in Akshardham

Gandhinagar, Gujarat  
25 September 2002

The world watched in shock as the harrowing and tragic events unfolded at Akshardham, a unique cultural complex dedicated to world peace and harmony. On the ill-fated day of September 24th, 2002, this holy place of pilgrimage that represented the universal message of hope and peace to people all over the world was attacked by terrorists. What started at 4:50pm in the evening ended in an extremely terrifying and heinous carnage. The series of events that took place on that day are described as they happened:

1. A white car carried two terrorists to the outskirts of the Akshardham area's Gate 3 at 4:45pm. The terrorists took out their sleeping bags and jackets full of automatic weapons and grenades to arm themselves as the car sped away.
2. The terrorists tried to enter the complex through the main Gate 3, but the volunteer security guards stopped them for a security check. Terrorists then jumped the fence and rushed to the main walkway of Akshardham, opening fire on the innocent tourists and pilgrims browsing at a nearby book stall.
3. Both the terrorists charged towards the main stone monument, while throwing hand grenades. In the mean time, the organization's volunteers communicated with the volunteers working in the main monument through the intercom. The main monument was thus locked shut from inside. The terrorists failed to infiltrate the main monument by mere seconds.
4. With their attempts to damage the main monument foiled, the terrorists switched their targets and dashed towards the exhibition halls. The volunteers had closed the doors of the multimedia theater from the inside. The terrorists instead sneaked through the EXIT door in to the Exhibition Hall 1. After getting inside, they went on a maddening shooting rampage targeting the exhibition audience inside the hall consisting of innocent men, women, and children, killing or wounding many.
5. The terror unleashed by the two mad men ceased once the militants got out of the EXIT door again to climb up the roof top and hid there.
6. All this had merely taken 5-10 minutes, but that was enough time for the police security guards and commando units to show up at the premise. The police and commandos escorted hundreds of visitors from around the complex to safety and helped transport the injured to the nearby hospitals.
7. The commandos and security forces started their vigorous search for the two terrorists, knowing they could be anywhere on the 23-acre campus. While the terrorists were busy retreating to another hide out, the security forces took advantage of the momentary cease fire by successfully transfering the remaining 80 to 100 visitors from Exhibition Hall 1 to a secure area outside the complex.
8. As the security forces brought out the visitors secured behind the closed doors of the main monument, the terrorists opened fire at the commandos. Fortunately, no one was hit. The commandos surrounded the area and continued the cross fire making it impossible for the terrorists to escape.
9. In the mean time, Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Advani ordered India's top notch National Security Guard, the Black Cat commandos, to be airlifted from Delhi and join the hunt for the terrorist at Akshardham. At around 11:30pm, the hunt intensified as the special Black Cats took their positions within Akshardham complex and formulated their attack strategies after assessing the situation under the leadership of Brigadier Sitapati.
10. Also in the meantime, India's President Mr. Abdul Kalam placed a personal call to Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the leader of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha and the inspirer of Akshardham, to express his condolences. Deputy PM Mr. Advani assured Pramukh Swami that he will do everything possible to overpower the two terrorists. India's Prime Minister Mr. Vajpai also communicated from Maldives.
11. The shoot out and the hunt continued sporadically through the night. The terrorists became desperate at the daybreak. The firing reached a feverish pitch. At around 6:45am, the Black Cat commandos ended the 14 hour long ordeal by shooting the two terrorists hiding in the bushes.
12. In the mean time, doctors and medical staff at the local hospitals kept on performing the grueling tasks to save lives of those who were gravely injured. BAPS volunteers and members donated blood to help save precious lives. The final casualty count reached 33, with 70 wounded.

As the horrifying events unfurled, many national and international dignitaries, government officials, organizations, and media have reached out to express their deepest condolences for this tragedy. Several national leaders, irrespective of their political alignments or differences, paid a visit to Akshardham Complex. Some of them were the Prime Minister of India Mr. Vajpayee, the Deputy PM Mr. Advani, Governor of Gujarat Mr. Sundersinh Bhandari, Chief Minister of Gujarat Mr. Narendra Modi, and Congress Party Leader Sonia Gandhi.

Akshardham carnage is a yet another international tragedy where the terrorists have taken lives of innocent men, women, and children in a senseless act of violence. Their act of cowardice is even more acutely felt since it was perpetrated in the midst of the very place that serves as an inspiring source of peace, harmony, and tolerance.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj has offered his deepest sympathy and prayers for the unfortunate victims and their grieving relatives. He has also prayed for the quick recovery of those who are injured. His ardent wish was that such tragedies never afflict any community or nation anywhere in the world. Finally, he has appealed to the citizens of India to maintain peace and harmony in the wake of this national tragedy.

**About Akshardham**  
The Akshardham Complex is a 23-acre site that is dedicated to peace, harmony and social understanding. Using modern technology, the traditional values that are the foundation of the Indian culture are conveyed through marvelous multimedia presentations, sculptures and gardens. The Complex is also home to priceless Indian literature. Created by volunteers and dedicated to Lord Swaminarayan, Akshardham is a powerful experience that attracts over 2 million visitors annually, including such dignitaries as former President Bill Clinton, His Holiness Dalai Lama, Indian Ambassador to the United States Abid Hussain, Prince Philip of the United Kingdom and the former president of Poland, Lech Walesa.  
For more information on Akshardham, visit its website at [www.akshardham.com](http://www.akshardham.com/gujarat/).  
 **About BAPS**  
BAPS is a worldwide socio-spiritual organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations dedicated to peace and harmony. BAPS strives to provide spiritual, cultural and social care for society as a whole and is known for its strict observance of ahimsa, the Hindu code of nonviolence. BAPS conducts humanitarian work through a worldwide network consisting of over 8,100 centers, including 4,070 children's centers. Some examples of BAPS' work include natural disaster relief, water conservation and reforestation. Most recently, BAPS was instrumental in the recovery, relief and rehabilitation efforts of the state of Gujarat after the devastating earthquake in January 2001. In North America, over 50,000 families carry out the vision of BAPS.