Ethiopia links blast to Oromo rebels

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The attack disrupted New Year celebrations

Ethiopian police say that armed secessionist bombers who blew up a hotel in Addis Ababa last month, killing at least five people, were planning a mass campaign to destroy infrastructure and kill people throughout the capital.

Police say that they have arrested five men from the armed secessionist movement, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and have evidence that the OLF was planning a series of bombings in the capital.

The OLF, which has been fighting for the self-determination of Ethiopia's Oromia region for nine years, has denied responsibility for the attack.

The five arrested men, who say they are members of the OLF, say they were ordered to blow up the Tigray hotel and other hotels, as well as...
The blast caused extensive damage to the hotel

Casualties

During the festivities of the Ethiopian Orthodox New Year, which falls on 11 September, two explosions rocked the Tigray Hotel, which was packed with over 100 people celebrating the new year.

At least five people died and more than 38 were injured in the attack, and about US$350,000 worth of damage was caused to the hotel.

"The culprits used two explosives to blow up the hotel, and we found 18 other explosives in their homes," said Police Commissioner Workeneh Gebayhu, who is in charge of the investigation.

"After questioning, we believe that the OLF was going to use the other explosives to wreak havoc throughout the city. The Tigray Hotel was just one of the places that they were going to destroy," Commissioner Workeneh added.

In addition to the explosives, the commissioner said that the police had found pistols, bullets and OLF documents, including e-mails, faxes and receipts with the OLF stamp on them.

State-owned Ethiopian television last week showed the five men admitting to the bombing and even demonstrating how they planned the

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bombing operation and detonated the two explosives at the Tigray Hotel.

The police have released the names of the five men as Daniel Ayana, Chernat Yemane, Mesfin Etana, Mesfin Mosisa and Mitiku Tesfai.

The police say that they are not sure of their occupations, but one said that he was a student, another said he was a driver and a third, a jewellery shop assistant.

All are believed to be between 20 and 30 years of age.

**Precedent**

This is the second time that the Tigray Hotel has been targeted.

Five years ago, the hotel was hit by a bomb blast which killed a waitress and injured 33 others. That attack was also blamed on the OLF.

The OLF, which has been in exile for the past seven years, denied responsibility for the latest bombing.

In a statement following the bombing, the movement condemned the attack, saying that the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was trying to jump on the anti-terrorism bandwagon "to use it as a political ticket to stay in power".

The OLF says that following the bombing of the hotel, Ethiopian police have unleashed a campaign to arrest...
and torture "innocent" Oromos, in order to link the incident with the OLF.

"The regime has a track record of fabricating lies and deceitfully manipulating incidents to blackmail and incriminate its opponents," the OLF statement added.

But Ethiopian police have denied the OLF's assertions.

The Oromos are the largest ethnic group in the country and make up almost 40% of Ethiopia's 65 million population.

Some Oromos complain that their rights are not respected by the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front government.