

Attack car traced to Anantnag, its owner missing, suspected to be Jaish, says NIA

2011 Maruti Eeco changed hands 7 times, last on Feb 4: Probe



Car owner Sajjad Bhat. NIA

**RAHUL TRIPATHI &
DEEPTIMAN TIWARY**
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 25

ANNOUNCING A major breakthrough in the Pulwama terror attack in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) said that it had identified the owner of the vehicle that was used by the attacker who has been claimed by Jaish-e-Mohammed to be its recruit Adil Ahmed Dar.

The NIA said Monday that the Maruti Eeco car was last sold on February 4, just 10 days before the attack, to one Sajjad Bhat, a resident of Bijbehara in Anantnag, who is now absconding and is suspected to have joined Jaish.

The 22-year-old, sources said, has been associated with militant groups in the Valley for the

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Car traced to Anantnag, its owner missing

past two years. Investigators are trying to ascertain when he came in contact with JeM and Dar. "Sajjad is a student of Siraj-ul-Uloom, Shopian. A raid was conducted by NIA team at his house with the help of J&K Police on February 23. However, Sajjad was found not present in his house and thereafter has been evading arrest. He has reportedly now joined JeM. A photograph to this effect has also appeared in social media where Sajjad is seen holding weapons," the NIA said.

NIA investigators identified the vehicle used for the blast with the support of forensic and automobile experts.

According to the agency, the vehicle — chassis MA3ERLF1S00183735 and engine G12BN164140 — was sold

to Mohammed Jaleel Ahmed Haqani, a resident of Heaven Colony in Anantnag, in 2011. It changed hands seven times before reaching Sajjad, it said.

Explaining how NIA tracked the vehicle, a Home Ministry official said: "After ascertaining the chassis number, investigators identified the month and year in which the Maruti Eeco was manufactured. The vehicle identification number (VIN) has 19 letters and is unique to every car. The alphanumeric code in this case helped track the first owner. Car companies usually split the month and year of manufacturing into English letters and with their help, the NIA was able to establish the chain of ownership."

The official added that the agency is learnt to have also

traced the source of funds for buying the vehicle.

In a recent social media post, Sajjad can be seen holding guns claiming to be part of the JeM suicide squad. The post also mentions the name of Afzal Guru who was hanged in 2013 after being convicted for his role in 2001 Parliament attack said to be the handiwork of JeM.

NIA sources said the car was bought on February 4 for the attack and had been driven from Anantnag to Pulwama where it was packed with an IED. "It is suspected that Dar and Sajjad Bhat knew each other. Both have been claimed by JeM to be their operatives," an NIA officer said.

Sources said the agency is verifying all the people who have been in touch with Sajjad in the past few months and is

tracing all calls he made and received over the recent past.

The Indian Express had on February 23 first reported that NIA had traced the car's manufacturing to 2011 and was close to tracking the owner.

Dar detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) inside the red-coloured car after manoeuvring it close to the fifth bus in the CRPF convoy that was moving on the Jammu-Srinagar highway.

The New York Times reported that two Western security officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, "said that an experienced bomb maker from Pakistan most likely traveled across the border and built an unusually powerful bomb for the young Kashmiri to detonate."