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Bomb probe blames record keeping

A major official investigation into the biggest single act of mass murder in recent Irish history was hampered by inadequate police records.

By: Press Association

The probe into the 1974 bombings in Dublin and Monaghan found no evidence that alleged British state collusion in the atrocity played a role the subsequent winding down of the Garda murder inquiry.

Missing files, lax procedures and evidence lost in the aftermath of the killing of 33 people thwarted the inquiry headed by up a leading criminal law barrister.

Paddy MacEntee SC, in his long-awaited report, uncovered a catalogue of failures by Gardai and the Justice Department.

He said it wasn't possible to fully account for how many files were missing, lost or destroyed from the original Garda investigation.

While he couldn't confirm why the evidence was missing he didn't rule out unauthorised removal of the documents.

"The failure to account for security and intelligence material is a serious failure, which could have very grave consequences for individuals

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mentioned or implicated in such material," he said.

The probe couldn't substantiate one of the key concerns of the families of the victims that pressure was brought to bear on the gardai to dump the investigation just three months after it began.

"The commission is satisfied that there is no evidence available to it which is capable of establishing any connection between the collusion alleged and the `winding down` of the Garda investigations into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings."

Taoiseach Bertie Ahern said he would be calling a full debate in the Dail parliament on the MacEntee report and on the issue of collusion during the Troubles.

"Mr MacEntee's report is a further step on the way to uncovering the truth of what happened on that terrible day in 1974 when so many people lost their lives or were injured," said Mr Ahern.

"The Government has considered the findings carefully.

"Although they relate to a difficult period in the past and it is clear that there have been very significant improvements in recent years, the findings with regard to shortcomings and omissions are a matter of serious concern.

"I have asked for a full review to be carried out of all systems and procedures in the relevant Government departments and agencies to ensure that the failures found by Mr MacEntee do not occur in future."

Mr Ahern said he had asked for that review to be submitted to Government within three months.

The 249-page report, which was delayed nine times, also criticised the Justice Department's handling of security and intelligence records.

While it was clear registered files from the department's security division had gone missing it couldn't be established how many other records had been lost.

The department's practice of keeping unregistered Garda files posed a serious threat to persons identified in the documents, it was found.

Mr MacEntee said the failure of gardai to notice the absence of documents from its own files was just as disturbing as the fact they were missing.

Key questions the Commission of Investigation set up in 2005 was charged with answering included:

:: Why was the Garda investigation wound down?

The commission found no evidence of any formal or informal decision to

close down the probe. But inadequate records frustrated its attempts to establish if all lines of inquiry were followed. Garda practices of not maintaining full records, the deaths of key detectives and failing memories over the passage of time hampered Mr MacEntee`s work.

:: Why did gardai not follow up on leads?

It was found that only one significant lead wasn`t followed up but there was no reason established as to why. The full extent of co-operation between the Garda and the RUC couldn`t be established because of inadequate records.

:: Did investigators probe claims that a British Army corporal was sighted in Dublin in suspicious circumstances at the time of the bombings?

The commission ruled that the evidence of the eye-witness wasn`t credible. Mr MacEntee travelled to meet with the corporal and the witness whose accounts differed significantly. He said he was satisfied the British soldier`s account is reliable. The commission dismissed claims that a suspect white van was never tracked but strongly criticised gardai for failing to accurately record its registration number.

:: Why were so many official files on the bombings missing?

Mr MacEntee could not establish why Garda and Justice Department records on the atrocity had been lost.

"The commission has identified a number of Garda documents which did exist but which have not been produced to the commission, and must be presumed to have been lost or destroyed," he said.

Opposition politicians immediately demanded the Taoiseach hold a full parliamentary debate on the report`s findings ahead of the expected general election next month.

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