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Mumbai attackers create 'killing zone'

By Soutik Biswas
BBC News, Mumbai.

Pappu Mishra was tending to his customers at his glass-walled cafe at the gothic Victorian Chattrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station in Mumbai when he spotted two sprightly young men dressed in black.



He remembers the two sauntering into the waiting hall, plonking their handbags on the floor, taking out a gun "which looked like an AK-47", and walking toward the platforms where they gunned down late-evening commuters on the city's busy suburban train network.

"Their audaciousness was breath-taking," he says.

"One man loaded the magazine into the gun, the other kept shooting. They appeared calm and composed. They were not in the slightest hurry. They didn't seem to be afraid at all."

The men entered a platform and shot a man near an automated teller machine.

Then they turned around and shot another commuter at the grubby, dark-tiled drinking water station around the corner.

Then, the "foreign looking, fair skinned" men, as Mr Mishra remembers them, simply carried on killing.

Outside the station, shipping firm executive Anil Kumar Goswami was sitting in a tea shop. He saw flashes of gunfire through the rusty ornamental iron and brass railings and wood carved windows.

He walked towards one of the gates to find out what was happening.

"As I entered the station, a shot rang out and I ducked. I lay on the floor and watched a horror film unfold," he says.

"I saw a man falling to gunfire. I saw one of the shooters walking across the platform. It was a festival of dead bodies."

Killing zone

Back at the station cafe, Mr Mishra ordered all customers to lie down on the floor even as a crescendo of gunfire rattled the building.

The shooters swung the gun around once. Bullets pierced the cafe's glass walls, hitting one of his employees. He is now on a life support machine.

"It was the longest 10-15 minutes of my life," Mr Mishra said. "They fired at least three rounds without any resistance. I had no clue why they were doing this."



Bags lay scattered at Chatrapati Shivaji station after the attack. In that short time, the two men turned one of India's most historic railroad stations into a killing zone.

"Bodies with gaping bullet wounds lay all over, and the waiting hall became a sea of blood," says Mr Mishra.

At least 10 people died at the station, also known as Victoria Terminus, on what newspapers described as Mumbai's "darkest night".

Officials say that of the more than 100 people who died in Wednesday's attacks by a group of unidentified gunmen, the majority of the dead were commuters waiting to get on to trains at the station.

The police arrived half an hour after it was all over and the men had vanished into a balmy Mumbai evening.

"The system is loose, the security is hollow. They killed as they wished, and there were no policemen around," Mr Mishra says.

Cafe attack

Not far across town, Judith Rosta, a German teacher from Vienna, had completed a shoot for a music video for two Indian singers and was walking past the market at Colaba, the hip, touristy hub of posh south Mumbai, with her Russian girlfriend, Valentina.

She says she was buying papayas when she noticed three men on a motorcycle stopping on the road and taking out "big guns".

"They wore white jeans and T-shirts. They were shouting, getting agitated and waved their guns around.

"I dropped my shopping and began walking away towards my hotel. Minutes later, a friend called up saying that there had been a bloody incident of firing in the area," she says.



Leopold Cafe owner Farzed Jehani: 'A grenade was thrown in to the restaurant'

Hours after the shooting at the Leopold Cafe, a cult city cafe and a favourite hangout of foreigners and locals alike, the place smelt of stale beer and bleaching powder.

Broken crockery from a market stall lay strewn on the sidewalk. Fresh blood stains on the bullet-pocked wall were mixed with the old betel- leaf spit stains.

Locals say the orgy of killings in Mumbai began here. Three men walked into the cafe, drank beer, settled their bills and walked out. Then they fished out guns from their bags and began firing.

Gaffar Abdul Amir, an Iraqi tourist from Baghdad, says he saw at least two men who started the firing outside the Leopold Cafe.

He was returning to his hotel from the seaside with a friend when he saw two men carrying bags and brandishing AK-47s walking in front of them, shooting.

"They did not look Indian, they looked foreign. One of them, I thought, had blonde hair. The other had a punkish hairstyle. They were neatly dressed," says Mr Amir.

As the two girls fell near the cafe, he saw the two men quickening their steps towards the Taj Mahal hotel further up the road.

A few minutes later, gunfire was heard from the hotel, and much later, Mr Amir heard that gunmen had taken guests hostage.

Missing relatives

Sixteen hours after the attacks, people are still waiting for their relatives to come out of the hotel.

Vishram Tulsiram Nagde spent all of Thursday near the hotel trying to find out whether his brother and uncle, who worked in the hotel, were trapped inside.

His brother works in the housekeeping department, and his uncle is a cook in the hotel. They did not return home after they finished work on Wednesday night.

"I am very worried. We have no clue where they are. The police is not telling us anything. And we cannot get in touch with the hotel," he says.

All around, shops are shuttered and offices are closed. There is little traffic on the roads. Throngs of curious people move around talking about the attacks.

VS Naipaul once famously said: "Mumbai is a crowd". A day after the attacks, Mumbai was barely crawling.

