

‘They shook hands and gave a thumbs-up sign’

Ritu Sarin Posted online: Sun Nov 30 2008, 02:09 hrs

After a hard day’s work, residents of the fishing colony at Badwar Park would sit by the seashore every evening. But on Wednesday, when terror struck Mumbai, the fishermen were not by the sea. They sat huddled inside in front of their TV sets, watching Indian batsmen cruise to victory against England.

Anita Rajender Uraiya, who spends her day selling waste material in a small shop along Badwar Park, also known as Macchimar Nagar, however, was one of those who went to the seashore at 8.30 p.m. She noticed a dinghy dock with six tough-looking youth and remembers how they flung their life jackets on the boat, picked up their “baggage” and came ashore.

She asked them what they were doing here. “Tumhe kya? Tum apna kaam karo (What is it to you? Mind your business),” one of the men retorted and got into a huddle with his companions. The men and children in the colony continued to cheer the Indian cricket team.

The 45-year old from Satara says each of the six men was carrying two heavy blue plastic bags in each hand and had bulging backpacks. Four of them then headed towards the Gateway of India and two split from the group and walked off towards the Sasoon Docks.

“Before the two groups parted, they all shook hands and gave a thumbs up sign,” she remembers. Just over an hour later, she realised she had seen destruction dock before her eyes.

Fishermen say watching the cricket match saved their lives. “If we had been by the seaside, the men would have killed us. They were heavily armed,” said Moreshwar Tande, a loader who works with Air India and lives in the colony.

Along with Badwar Park, the adjoining Sasoon Dock area has also caught the attention of gawking Mumbaikars. Since Friday, the dock area has been cordoned off and loading operations have been stopped after a Coast Guard ship accompanied Kuber, the fishing trawler on which the militants are believed to have arrived from Gujarat, on Thursday night to the docks.

The Sunday Express reached the docks even as crime teams from the Mumbai Police and top officials of the Coast Guard had begun their inspection of the trawler. Kuber is now docked a long distance away from the jetty off the Sasoon Docks. It looks decrepit and has an Indian flag fluttering atop. It may provide some useful leads on how terror struck Mumbai so easily.

High-level reviews have resulted in an assessment that “sufficient” warning about the possibility of a seaborne attack on Mumbai was available with intelligence agencies right from 2006. But the telephone intercepts—since compiled in New Delhi—were found to give only vague and non-specific information. Officials do not rule out the possibility that some of the militants attended the Pakistani naval camp in the Magla dam area of Pakistan in 2006, where training was provided by a batch of 500 Lashkar-e-Toiba militants in a series of underwater exercises and aimed at attacks on Indian off-shore installations and port towns.