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Armed Teams Sowed Chaos With Precision

By [KEITH BRADSHER](#)

MUMBAI, India — As Prasan Dhanur prepared his 13-foot boat on Wednesday evening for a hard night of fishing, he saw something strange.

A black inflatable lifeboat equipped with a brand new Yamaha outboard motor threaded its way among the small, wooden fishing boats at anchor and pulled up to the slum's concrete pier.

Ten men, all apparently in their early 20s, jumped out. They stripped off orange windbreakers to reveal T-shirts and blue jeans. Then they began hoisting large, heavy backpacks out of the boat and onto their shoulders, each taking care to claim the pack assigned to him.

Mr. Dhanur flipped his boat light toward the men, and Kashinath Patil, a 72-year-old harbor official on duty nearby, asked the men what they were doing.

“I said: ‘Where are you going? What’s in your bags?’ “ Mr. Patil recalled. “They said: ‘We don’t want any attention. Don’t bother us.’ “

Thus began a crucial phase of one of the deadliest terrorist assaults in Indian history, one that seemed from the start to be coordinated meticulously to cause maximum fear and chaos.

Indian officials had said little publicly about the attackers until Saturday, when the Mumbai police commissioner, Hasan Gafoor, said a total of 10 militants had been responsible for the mayhem. But it remained unclear whether he was referring to 10 attackers arriving by sea to join other accomplices. Unconfirmed local news reports suggested some militants had embedded themselves in Mumbai days before the attacks. Investigations were ongoing Saturday night. In any event, the synchronized assaults suggested a high level of training

and preparation.

Mr. Dhanur and Mr. Patil said in interviews that they did not see the guns hidden in the backpacks, and did not call the police as they watched the men walk into town on Wednesday, leaving their boat and windbreakers at the dock. Not long afterward, fanning out across South Mumbai, as other attackers spread out after landing in other boats, the men began unleashing deadly assaults everywhere they went.

At the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, the train station that appears to have been the first location hit, a fusillade of bullets left the floor of the main hall quickly littered with bodies and pools of blood. At the Leopold Cafe, a chic restaurant popular with Westerners and wealthy Indians and famous for sidewalk dining, a cluster of gunmen mowed down diners.

At the opulent Taj Mahal and Oberoi hotels, the assailants poured heavy fire into restaurant goers on the ground floors, then moved upstairs to round up guests as hostages. And at a range of other locations, from a movie theater to a hospital to a police station, the attackers opened fire remorselessly on anyone in their path, frequently throwing grenades as well.

With proximity to Pakistan and visibility as the hub of India's financial sector, Mumbai has suffered many terrorist attacks over the years. But the killings this week, played out so publicly and prolonged over so many days, have shaken many as never before.

"In 51 years, I have never seen this kind of thing," said Dev B. Gohil, a tailor and lifelong Mumbai resident. "We're scared for ourselves and for our families."

One reason for the nervousness is that it seems likely that not nearly all the terrorists were caught or killed — and so far the whereabouts of the rest are a mystery. At least eight were confirmed dead on Friday, although more might be found as soldiers and the police combed through the two hotels. Security officials declared that they had taken control of the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower on Saturday morning, killing three militants.

Estimates of the number of attackers have ranged from 20 to 40, with the number depending to a considerable extent on the number of boats involved. As security forces seek to reconstruct how the gunmen managed to inflict so much carnage so quickly, they have been turning their attention to how so many assailants managed to reach the heart of Mumbai undetected and with such a large collection of guns, ammunition and explosives.

Fishermen here said that the police removed and impounded the boat that came ashore here at the Fishermen's Colony pier where Mr. Dhanur lives. Various local news media have reported the impoundment of at least one — and as many as four — other boats at other nearby locations on the coast of South Mumbai, one of the city's oldest neighborhoods.

The Times of India newspaper reported on Friday that the Coast Guard had found an Indian fishing trawler, the Kuber, that disappeared on Nov. 14. The Kuber may have been used as a so-called mother ship to transport inflatable rafts within range of South Mumbai, much as pirate mother ships from Somalia, across the Arabian Sea from Mumbai, have used smaller boats to hijack tankers and other vessels in recent weeks.

The Kuber's 30-year-old captain was found dead on the boat, and his four crew members were missing, The Times of India said.

Not all of the terrorists may have entered Mumbai on the night of the attack. Local news media, citing anonymous law enforcement officials, are reporting that one captured terrorist has said during interrogation that some members of his group had stayed in hotels for four days before the attacks to prepare for them and even to store ammunition in the rooms.

When the terrorists landed in front of Mr. Dhanur's boat, they were just three blocks straight down a narrow lane from Nariman House, a five-story building housing a Jewish center run by a young rabbi, Gavriel Holtzberg, and his wife, Rivka, who had moved from New York.

But the attack does not appear to have started there. According to India's Home Ministry, the first shots were fired at the train station, and soon after that at the Leopold Cafe.

Popular with tourists, the cafe is about eight blocks from the dock where Mr. Dhanur was surprised by the arrival of the inflatable raft. It is just a block behind a top target for the terrorists: the luxurious Taj Hotel, Mumbai's most famous place for maharajahs and wealthy businesspeople to stay.

A large red sign over the two double-width entrances to the Leopold Cafe still boasts that the restaurant has been in business "since 1871." But the steel shutters of the Leopold were pulled down over the entrances on Friday afternoon, sealing the site of a deadly assault.

The attackers stood at the entrances and raked the diners with heavy fire from assault rifles. The power of the rounds is still visible from three shots that missed the diners. They struck the thick concrete columns on either side of an entrance and penetrated more than an inch

deep, leaving red stains.

Through a gap at the top of the shutters, the darkened restaurant could still be seen. Half-eaten meals still sat on tables and napkins lay on tables and chairs, as though the diners had disappeared suddenly into thin air.

Few signs of the fallen remained visible on Friday afternoon, and no official tally of casualties from this attack has been released.

After the train station and the Leopold Cafe, at least some of the terrorists attacked and occupied three buildings from which the police would find it very difficult to dislodge them: the two hotels and Nariman House.

At the hotels, the attackers managed to hide in a maze of rooms, especially at the Taj, and so avoided easy capture. The smaller Oberoi proved more difficult for the assailants, and they were defeated there first, with the police leading out dozens of hostages at midday on Friday.

Nariman House took a full day on Friday for the army to capture, as the attackers holed themselves up in the middle floors of the building, where they could not easily be reached from the ground or from above. Only on Friday evening were the assailants finally overwhelmed.

The most complex building, the Taj Hotel, with its many passageways, took the longest to clear. The National Security Guard announced Saturday morning that it believed the last three gunmen had been killed, and declared the siege over.

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