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Mumbai's night of terror without end

Thursday , Nov 27, 2008 at 2230 hrs IST

MUMBAI

Mumbai, the gateway to India, has been stormed by terrorists.

A city in siege and a horrified nation watched perhaps the most audacious attack by terrorists at home as heavily armed men, with automatic weapons, grenades and low-intensity bombs, struck at least nine locations killing over 70 people and wounding some 200.

Landmark symbols of cosmopolitanism and affluence as well as public hubs were targeted. The dead included top police officers such as the chief of the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad Hemant Karkare, Additional Commissioner (East) Ashok Kamte and encounter specialist Inspector Vijay Salaskar. All were killed fighting the attackers.

The attacks, sophisticated and co-ordinated on a scale never seen before, continued well into the night as reports trickled in of fresh explosions and continuing gun battles.

Two of the suspected attackers were shot dead in an encounter near the popular and crowded Girgaum

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MEDALTALLY

307

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COUNTRY	G	S	B	TOTAL
USA	46	29	29	104
CHN	38	27	23	88
GBR	29	17	19	65
RUS	24	26	32	82
KOR	13	8	7	28
GER	11	19	14	44
FRA	11	11	12	34
ITA	8	9	11	28
HUN	8	4	5	17
AUS	7	16	12	35
IND	0	2	4	6

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Chowpatty off Marine Drive a little after midnight. But there was no immediate information available about the identity of those attackers or their accomplices, some of whom were seen by witnesses carrying automatic rifles and carrying haversacks.

The attacks began in south Mumbai around 9.30 pm as the business district wound up for the day and hotels and restaurants were filled with guests — a sharp contrast to the serial blasts on local trains in July 2006 which targeted passengers during peak commute hour after work.

The targets included two five-star hotels, the historic Taj Mahal hotel near the Gateway of India and the Trident in Nariman Point; Café Leopold, a restaurant popular with locals and foreign tourists in Colaba; the crowded Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station or Victoria Terminus (VT) as it was earlier called, from where the violence spread to the nearby Metro Cinema multiplex; a taxi under a flyover in Vile Parle; and another taxi near the Dockyard Road station.

Café Leopold, Colaba

It all started at this popular watering hole a little before 9.30 p.m. when three men inside the busy restaurant pulled out machine guns from haversacks and began to shoot indiscriminately.

“There were three men shooting inside Café Leopold. As the crowd started fleeing, two more people started shooting from outside the hotel. I saw one of them reload the gun and again engaged in the shooting spree. The entire episode lasted for some 20 minutes,” said Sheikh Pasha, who was hanging out near the restobar in Colaba. According to him, the attackers had ‘huge guns’ and were carrying a haversack bag.

“After the firing ended, I saw a man and a woman lying in a pool of blood. The assailants later took the lane which leads to the Taj hotel,” said Andrei Tambunan, a freelance American photographer who was at a cyber café, near the restobar. Six bodies, including those of some foreigners, were taken out of the restobar.

The Taj Mahal Hotel

After Leopold, next to be attacked was the Taj Mahal Hotel, a few hundred metres away. The attackers, eyewitness said, entered the Taj hotel at around 10 pm.

“The men came on the ground floor towards the pool side area and started firing indiscriminately at anything that moved. A man next to me was shot and died,” said an eyewitness who managed to escape the hotel. Senior officials of Hindustan Lever were present on the first floor of the hotel when the incident occurred.

Inside the hotel, there were two dead bodies near the swimming pool, two more in an upstairs corridor where police were combing. All those inside the hotel at the time had been huddled into small rooms by the staff, some into the chambers in the basement. “We could hear the gunshots coming closer, then the



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HOCKEY FOR 11-12TH PLACE/13.00: India vs South Africa

GOLD MEDAL EVENT ATHLETICS 50 KM WALK/13.30: Basanta Bahadur Rana

GOLD MEDAL EVENT MEN'S WRESTLING 60 KG FREESTYLE/17.30: Yogeshwar Dutt

glass in the Crystal Room shattered,” said one diner.

“We crouched on the floor while the shooting continued,” she continued. “Then the staff came and took us into the chambers inside.”

Later, there were two more explosions heard at the Taj. The devastation in the second round of attacks here was massive, said reports.

CST

Four men with automatic rifles entered the CST station around 10 pm and two started firing indiscriminately first towards the crowd outside and then inside the station. The other two were spotted rushing towards the Metro Cinema multiplex via the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation offices and the Azad Maidan next door. The two holed up inside the station took refuge in an empty local train coach and were apparently cornered by police. But they had killed at least 10 people by then and wounded 30.

TRIDENT

Firing heard around 10.10 p.m. near the hotel, just across The Indian Express office at Express Towers, forcing guests and taxi drivers outside to flee. Bodies were taken out and frightened hotel staffers came out crying. Glass windows in the upper floors of the Trident were being shattered.

“Bachao Bachao,” people were shouting from behind them. A brief while later, two explosions hit the hotel within minutes of each other and sparked a fire.

VILE PARLE

A powerful blast occurred in a taxi around 10.30 p.m. killing its lone passenger and driver on the spot.

Witnesses said the power of the blast was such that the head of one of the victims was flung about 200 metres into the premises of the Golden Swan City Club nearby. The taxi was ripped apart into three pieces.

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