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India: Witness identifies Mumbai gunman as one who stole car.

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Text of report by Indian news agency PTI

Mumbai, 30 July: A witness on Thursday [30 July] identified arrested Pakistani gunman Ajmal Kasab as one of the persons who stole his car on the night of 26 November last year.

Shravan Arasa, who runs a restaurant in suburban Juhu, said on the night of 26 November last year he came to know that his friend Siddharth Umashankar, who works as a sales manager with the Oberoi Hotel, was trapped in the hotel due to the terror attack.

After picking up friend Samit Asgaonkar and his wife Megha in the Mahim area of central Mumbai, Arasa said they drove towards Nariman Point.

However, on their way they learnt that their friend was among those evacuated and was safe at the nearby CR2 shopping mall, Arasa told Special Public Prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam.

When the car reached near Vidhan Bhavan a police vehicle approached them from the opposite direction.

"Somebody shouted directing at us and one round was fired in the air," he said, adding that he stopped his car.

From one side of the police vehicle, a short person alighted and told them to get out of the car, Arasa said.

"The driver of the vehicle also came out and pulled me by the collar out of the car," he said.

Arasa said he saw that his friends were already seated on the pavement near the car and as he alighted, the car's key which was in his hand fell to the ground.

"The short man pointed a gun at me and asked where the key of the car was. I told him I had dropped it," he said.

When Prosecutor Nikam asked him to identify the person, Arasa pointed to Kasab.

Arasa said, he then picked up the key, which was under the car, and handed it to one of the gunmen. After that the gunmen got into the vehicle and sped away.

Within a few minutes, multiple police vehicles arrived at the spot and they narrated the entire incident to police after which they left for his friend's house, Arasa said.

They later went and recorded their statement with the police and a day later Arasa said the car was shown to him by the police with bullet marks on one side. The vehicle was returned to him on 23 January.

The court on Thursday also recorded the statements of two police officials, Abdul Rauf Shaikh and Bhimrao Sarolkar.

Kasab on Thursday appeared before the court in prison uniform prompting his lawyer Abbas Kazmi to raise an objection to it, but when asked by the court the Pakistani gunman said with a smile that he had no problem in wearing them.

Source: PTI news agency, New Delhi, in English 2030gmt 30 Jul 09

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