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Today's Edition

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Just a little gunfire, ma'am!



Shattered windows at the Oberoi (Reuters)

Srijit Tagore, a member of the Pathuriaghat Tagore family in the city, who works for a UK company, was at Trident during the Mumbai terror attack. He recounts the experience

It was business as usual at the Oberoi and Trident on November 26 evening. My colleague David Perry (Dave) and I had an early dinner. I returned to my room on the 24th floor of the Trident at about 9.05pm and switched on the computer to chat with my son. While the computer was booting, I heard a burst of firecrackers. Or so I thought. Then all of a sudden the core of the earth reverberated with a noise I had never heard before. The entire hotel shook with another sound of equal magnitude. The window in front of my room that faced the sea was dark with smoke.

I was shaking. I switched on the TV and heard that firing was going on at the Victoria Terminus. I called up my son and he switched on the TV at our home, which was to become my source of information for the next 36 hours. I dialled Dave's room, we talked for a second and I picked up my wallet, passport and cellphone and rushed to the door and pressed the elevator button. With no result. I was trapped.

I returned to my room and the long wait began. All channels were broadcasting the blast from Leopold Cafe, Victoria Terminus, Cama Hospital, Taj, Nariman House and the Oberoi and Trident. I tried calling the front desk as well as all other service lines, but none would work. It was hardly 10 minutes since the last gre

I called my wife and daughter, who were in Paris. My cellpho from friends and relatives. I switched off the lights and pulled

Around 4am the next morning, the gunfire stopped suddenly. silence. Thankfully from the TV I learnt that the NSG was on. politicians were making statements from the luxury of their Z-

At about 10am, nearly 12 hours after the siege had begun, I had arrived. Soon the television blacked out, followed by fier hand grenades. From the messages I learnt that the terrorists: 18th floor of the hotel and that the lobby and some floors wer duck with my cellphone, the only connection between me and

I checked my mini bar to find that I had enough drinking wate nuts and biscuits and a bar of chocolate.

It was midday and the gunfire sounded constantly. My brother sent a messaged that the NSG was trying to secure the Trident. He said it is going to be a long haul — at least 19 hours. He was right.

The day dragged on until the sun set over the sea. Marine Drive was empty. It was only 6pm. I picked up the phone and began dialling one room after another on the 24th floor when finally room 2412 answered. This was a gentleman from Greece. We spoke from time to time, which was comforting. Around 9pm I received a message, or a call perhaps, which said that the terrorists were bursting room doors with grenades. I hid in a small space between the bathroom and the bed, which was not much protected but could save me from the grenade before bullets were sprayed. I thought I would prefer bullets to a grenade.

Around 2am, exhausted, I tried to lie down but was soon back between the bathroom and the bed following a loud grenade burst and gunfire. My son gave me a Trident helpline number in New Delhi. Here is the conversation that took place:

"Ma'am, what is the latest on the Trident?"

"Sir, the Trident is absolutely safe. Just stay in your room and you will be out very soon. Terrorists have been eliminated at the hotel."

[X]



Immediately there was a loud grenade burst and gunfire. The lady asked me: "Sir, what was that?" I replied: "A little gunfire!"

I managed to doze off for a couple of hours, only to wake and find that I had 36 missed calls and 50 text messages.

November 28 began with silence again. Around 9am, my brother called to say that the evacuation of Trident had started. At 11am my room phone suddenly rang. The voice at the other end said that someone would knock at my door and say "housekeeping". I should then open my door. Dave had called to say that he was out of the hotel.

There was a knock. When I opened the door I found at least 20 commandos and an equal number of armed men in plain clothes. I was escorted to the elevator along with the Greek gentleman.

The lobby was a nightmare. It was like a paper bag smashed beyond recognition. There was blood everywhere and not one piece of furniture was intact.

We were escorted to the Air India building and were overwhelmed by the crowd and the hotel staff who seemed like family.

Next day I left for Colombo in Sri Lanka much to the annoyance of my family. From the frying pan to the fire maybe. But life will not be compromised by senseless acts of violence.



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