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20 days after 26/11 police still to record eyewitness' statement

S Balakrishnan, TNN Dec 17, 2008, 04:21am IST

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MUMBAI: Even 20 days after the November 26 terror strike, the police are yet to record the statement of a resident of Macchimar Nagar on the Colaba seafront who witnessed the landing of the terrorists that fateful night.

Anita Wodeyar (35), who collects `bangar' (waste material) and sells it for a living, told TOI on Monday, "On November 26, I went to the jetty around 8.30 pm to get some fresh air. I saw an inflatable dinghy come towards the jetty. I found it odd because these kind of dinghies are not used by fishermen. I saw six youths, with backpacks and carrying two bags each, get down to the jetty. I asked them who they were. They asked me to mind my business and walked towards the road. Two of them turned right towards Badhwar Park and the rest turned left." When pointed out that 10 terrorists had taken part in the attacks, she replied, "I don't know if others had come by another dinghy."

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Two other local residents, Bharat Tandel and Bharat Tamore, had told the police that they saw 10 men in the dinghy.

A police official said, "Honestly, even now we do not know how many terrorists had come and in how many dinghies. It will be sometime before we gather all the details."

The recovery of two engine covers has given rise to speculation that the terrorists could have come in two dinghies. Another fisherman Eknath Dhanure (30) said that on November 25, around 3 am, he had spotted two orange-coloured metal tugs on the high seas. "I was returning after four days of fishing when I saw these two tugs with lights on them. I am familiar with all fishing trawlers and vessels of ONGC, Navy and the Coast Guard. But these two tugs looked different. The following morning they vanished."

Damodar Tandel, a prominent leader of fishermen and a long-time resident of Machchimar Colony, said: "The state government's fisheries department issues fishing licences to Bangladeshis on the basis of bogus ration cards. These Bangladeshis come from Pakistani waters and there are regular agents who help them get fishing licences which are valid for three years. An estimated Rs 4 crore is collected in bribes by the state fisheries department." In fact, there is a proposal to amend the Maritime Regulation of 1981 to dilute the licensing regulations, he added.

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