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Tracking the first victims to a note in Canada

Sagnik Chowdhury : Mumbai, Thu Nov 26 2009, 03:18 hrs



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It was among the first chilling photographs that shook the world on the morning after 26/11, capturing the horror and dastardly nature of the terror attack in Mumbai — an elderly foreign couple sprawled dead by the pool of the Hotel Taj Mahal Palace and Towers, with half-empty wine glasses and an unfinished plate of food on a table serving as reminders of their last moments.

The picture was shot by The Indian Express photographer Vasant Prabhu who was the first mediaperson to enter the hotel along with a small team of police officers who went in chasing the Lashkar-e-Toiba terrorists. If the picture was heartrending, the story of the two victims whose holiday was abruptly cut short like that of many others, is equally tragic.

The couple, Canadian nationals Dr Michael Stuart Moss and his partner Elizabeth Russell, frequently toured together, and had visited India before. But in an eerie coincidence, Moss, 73, had left a note to one of his colleagues saying he did not expect to survive the trip to India because of his heart condition and wished that Russell cremate him in India.

Remembered as a much-loved family physician, Moss was born and trained in England and also lived in Ireland for some time. He migrated to Canada in the 1960s, and worked at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Montreal, where he met Russell who worked as a nurse there. He worked at Montreal's Richardson Hospital before coming to India for his last trip and is survived by four children, including a daughter who is also a physician.

According to Alan Hustak, a Montreal-based writer, 65-year old Russell told her family that she expected her partner to die of a heart condition during their vacation while Moss left behind his ominous message in a memo outlining the couple's travel plans.

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