

Doctor walked into danger to treat wounded at Taj

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Dr Mursalin Shaikh

On Wednesday night, I was sitting down for a rare dinner with my mother at my flat in Kala Ghoda, when a staff member from Taj Hotel, which has a tie-up with my employer, Bombay Hospital, gave me a call. "There seems to be some sort of fight here at the hotel, please come across," he said. I had no inkling of the long night that lay ahead.

When I drove in to the hotel with my department head, I was surprised that there was no security at the entrance. I walked in to the lobby, and I saw some bodies, mostly foreigners, lying on the floor. I caught a fleeting glimpse of a man with a rucksack firing indiscriminately and running up the stairs. I tried to run out, but a policeman at the doors told me that the roads were also not safe with grenades being lobbed all over the place.

I called my wife, also a surgeon at Bombay Hospital, and she said, "Stay where you are. There has been a shootout at the Metro cinema. The area seems unsafe."

We, the hotel's general manager and my department head, decided to attend to the bodies, even as the sound of firing continued incessantly from the floors above.

I remember rushing to an elderly European man who had gone blue because of bullet injuries and I began administering resuscitation. He was put in an ambulance, but I do not know where he was taken and if he survived. Grenades were being lobbed in our direction, so we moved to the old wing, but we could see a fire there.

I felt scared, especially when there were two big blasts in the hotel before the Army came in. We had already spent three to four hours inside. I would call my surgeon wife every hour, and she was at Bombay Hospital treating the injured. She said, "I am missing you, and your medical expertise while treating the injured."

My mother phoned me. "Are you the only doctor in the city?" she cried. "Please come home."

But there was no question of leaving. Those who were dead had been lost. But those who were unconscious needed to be rushed to hospitals. We moved about 20 patients into ambulances.

We finally left the hotel at six in the morning. I stopped at home, and then went to the hospital. Doctors had come in through the night to help treat over 80 patients who had been brought in from various sites of attack. I am happy I could be of help to some people, and am relieved to be alive.