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Lathi & granddad's gun to take on hail of AK bullets

CHARU SUDAN KASTURI



Anti-terrorist squad officials take position outside Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus after rumours of fresh firing on Friday. (AP)

Mumbai, Nov. 28: Mahesh Jadhav pointed woefully to the fibreglass lathi with which he was expected to secure Mumbai's best-known railway station, and then a smirk broke out below his moustache.

"I can beat rogues with this, I can control a mob, too. But if confronted with AK-47 firing, I can only run," the railway police constable said.

His superior, Railway Protection Force head constable M.L. Chaudhry, was better equipped, Jadhav said. But on Wednesday night his .303 rifle was still no match for the AK-47s that sprayed bullets at Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. Especially since it refused to fire after the first two rounds, he said.

"I ran, but Chaudhry responded to the terrorist fire. But his rifle refused to fire after two rounds, a colleague who survived told me. It's a joke almost... we can't do anything more than lay down our lives. But our lives don't count to those in power," Jadhav said.

Away from the pulsating hostage drama at the Taj and Oberoi hotels and at Nariman House, crowds of daily commuters on the suburban routes today paid their homage to railway officials who died in the attack.

Group after group of passengers gathered in front of a three-metre tall blackboard with the details of railway officials killed at the station, reading and praying silently before drifting away slowly to catch their train.

Along with Chaudhry, Government Railway Police inspector Shashank Shinde and home-guard Mukesh Jadhav were also killed at CST, better known as Victoria Terminus,

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trying to repel the terrorist attack at the 120-year old railway station.

Santosh Sharma, a deputy chief ticket inspector with Western Railways, was scheduled to board a train out of Mumbai on duty when he was shot in the stomach, his colleagues recalled.

“He was wandering around near the lobby, talking to his wife on his mobile phone, when the terrorists started firing,” said ticket inspector Rakesh Mishra, calling Sharma his “guru”.

Sweeper Harkabai Lalji Salunkhe was just an hour from the end of her shift when she took a hit. She, too, did not survive.

Apart from the four casualties, eight employees of the railways were injured in the firing, and many of them are in serious condition, officials said.

The eight who are injured include head constable P.N. Giri, constable Feroz Khan and assistant sub-inspector R.J. Naik (all from the Railway Protection Force).

The others injured are reservation clerk S.S. Yadav, parcel porter Vijay Kale, booking clerk Ashok Teem and an attendant at the railways’ diesel shed, Vishal Prakash Kardak.

“These are all our heroes, and the contribution of the railways to the battle against the terror strikes is best exemplified by the manner in which we started our operations the very next day,” said Srinivas Mudgerikar, spokesperson for Central Railways, which is headquartered at Mumbai.

Local trains ran according to schedule through the day today, but the crush of people that throngs the bogeys was missing.

“On an ordinary day, I make Rs 600 by noon. Today, I have made less than Rs 100,” complained Sushil Kumar, who runs a snacks stall at CST with his brother Mukesh.

The brothers said they had arrived from their village in Madhya Pradesh only 10 days ago. “But we have already witnessed the worst scare of our lives,” Mukesh said.

The brothers were at their stall when the firing started on Wednesday night — around 9:45pm — and they “ran out immediately” hearing the gunshots.



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