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Cops clueless about Vile Parle taxi blast

Chinmayi Shalya & Vijay V Singh, TNN | Nov 28, 2008, 01:27 AM IST

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MUMBAI: Witnesses and police officials did not know whether to make a criminal or a martyr out of the mangled body, which lay at the Cooper Hospital morgue and was what remained of the driver of a taxi that exploded on Western Express Highway on Wednesday night.

The cab, which exploded not very far from the airport, claimed the lives of two - the cab driver and a passenger - and left two others injured.

The clues that the cops could have found handy were lost in the blast; parts of the taxi landed

almost 300 metres away after the blast and the licence plate and the registration number were lost forever.

Traffic officials and people present on the spot said the cab driver had broken the traffic signal on the highway seconds before the bomb went off. "All other vehicles stopped at the signal but the cab went ahead only to explode into a cloud of smoke and fire a couple of seconds later," a resident of Sambhaji Nagar, located right opposite the site of the blast, said.

"We are left wondering if he was carrying a bomb on his own or was an angel who took the cab ahead to save those waiting at the traffic signal," he added.

Officials said it was extremely difficult to identify the cab driver, whose body was completely torn to pieces. The passenger seated in the cab was found to be a Hyderabad-based advocate, who was in the city to fight a case.

The 57-year-old advocate, Laxminarayan Goyal, was on his way to Victoria Terminus to catch a train back home when he heard of the firing in South Mumbai. So, postponing his journey, Goyal took the cab back to his relative's place in Kandivli. "He was in touch with us till Dadar but then lost contact with him. We thought he was probably stuck somewhere because of the disturbances," Drishti Kedia, Goyal's daughter, said. "We could identify him by his clothes and some portions of his face," she added. Many of Goyal's friends, some of whom lived in Vile Parle, heard the explosion but they could scarce believe that it took his life as well.

Witnesses said the explosion was so powerful that it shrouded the vicinity in dust for more than 20 minutes. Police officials had a hard time putting the cab driver's body together. "His head was found behind the Golden Swan Hotel opposite the explosion site. We could put the body together only after 2 am," Cooper medical officer Pramod Nagarkar said.

The injured were in a state of daze. "I told my friend that I could not tell whether my right hand was still there. Moments later I realised that it was bleeding profusely," 35-year-old Shyam Sundar Choudhary, a worker in a biscuit factory, said.

The blast prompted a security beef-up at Hotel J W Marriott and extra *nakabandi* on the streets in the western suburbs.

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