

And to many here, Mumbai cop saves himself a hero

By Rick Rio

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File to "six degrees of separation" global folder:

When word broke of the Interstate 35W bridge span collapse, Sadanand Date, a veteran, high-ranking cop from India, banged out an e-mail from nearly 8,000 miles away to one of his former Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs study/work-group colleagues here.

"I read and saw with immense sense of grief and shock the news about the bridge collapse on 35W," Date (pronounced Dah-tay) wrote to Dan Bernard in an e-mail dated Aug. 2, 2007. "I was partly reassured when I saw the rescue efforts. I hope and trust that all of you and the family members are safe and secure."

On Monday, 16 months later, it was Bernard — a Humphrey Institute grad student now living and working in Maadi, Egypt — who sent out an eerily similar electronic note of concern.

Bernard had read online accounts that Date was critically injured or killed while battling terrorists at a city hospital full of women and children during last week's attacks in Mumbai, a metropolis of 18 million once known as Bombay.

"I just found out about it this morning because some Facebook users erroneously reported that he had died," Bernard e-mailed me about Date's plight Monday.

Date spent the 2005-06 academic year studying theoretical and practical aspects of preventing white-collar and organized crime at the Humphrey Institute.

"Sadanand is a very kind and thoughtful guy, a real humanist," Bernard added.

"I don't know where to start," wrote Kimberly Simon, another fellow student.

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"I am shocked, saddened, concerned and overwhelmed by the thoughts running through my head right now. I hadn't heard until now." It turns out Date not only survived but foiled a slaughter at the hospital. He is one tough cop, and a hero to boot.

In a published report, a Cama Hospital staffer briefly taken hostage by a pair of terrorists told how the gunmen opened fire and lobbed grenades as Date and cops under his command climbed a flight of stairs.

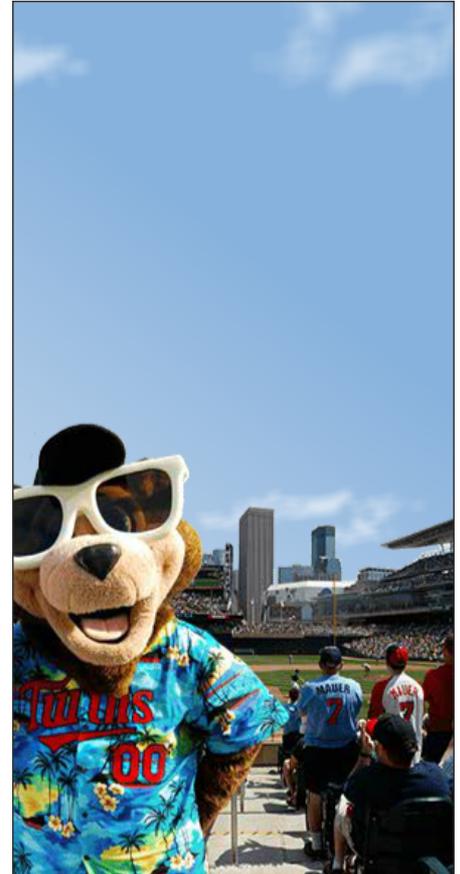
"After a while, they hurled two more grenades when the police officers continued to fire in

spite of suffering grievous grenade injuries," Chandrakant Tikhe, a hospital forklift operator, told the Indo-Asian News Service.

"I lay writhing in pain along with the injured policemen while their leader (Date) soldiered on, disregarding his bleeding wounds."



Sadanand Date battled terrorists attacking a hospital.



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Tikhe, 49, said the two terrorists were armed with AK-47 assault rifles — perhaps the most readily accessible weapon of mass destruction in the modern world — as well as a cache of grenades in satchel bags.

The bad guys — the best descriptor of any available — entered the hospital after gunning down two guards. They soon grabbed Tikhe.

"I tried to resist them, but when they threatened to kill me, I acquiesced and started walking down the stairs ahead of them," he said. Tikhe saw Date climbing the stairs.

Tikhe whispered to Date in Marathi, a language used in Maharashtra state, where Mumbai lies. It turned out to be a risky but right decision: It's Date's native tongue.

Date informed Tikhe that he should duck when the police officers opened fire on the terrorists.

The unknown gunmen fled the hospital grounds. But several officers were killed. Date was among the wounded.

"He's home now. He's recovering and sleeping," his wife told me in a brief phone conversation Monday from the family home in India.

Date, according to his wife, was initially listed in critical condition in the days after the attack. He sustained numerous injuries, mostly grenade shrapnel wounds. One fragment, still embedded, nearly took out an eye.

"He still has some," the wife said of the metal fragments. "But we believe he might recover in another two weeks."

To allay panic and correct misinformation, Date banged out an e-mail this week to friends here and across the globe.

"Hello, all," he wrote in an e-mail forwarded to me. "Thanks a lot for your concern, and prayers.

"I'm feeling fine now, but would need some rest and medical attention to get back to work. My family and me were overwhelmed by the support and good wishes. With regards."

'Nuff said. The protect-and-serve idealism is not only alive and well but universal.

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