



Mumbai attacks: One year on

Witnesses and relatives recall the horrors of last November's Mumbai (Bombay) attacks. The BBC's Prachi Pinglay hears their stories. HARISHCHANDRA GIRKAR, FIRE OFFICER

We got the first call around 11pm from the Trident Hotel. From there we went to the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel at about 1am.

We saw white smoke coming out from the heritage wing of the hotel. We could see flames behind the glass windows. Rescue work started around 3am. We would identify victims who were stuck, break open the window, go inside, comfort the guest and help him or her out.

I entered the hotel from the second floor and went into the corridor. Somehow the door shut behind me and would not open. I was trapped there and was wondering if the gunmen would come. But my seniors arrived soon and we all went out with the remaining victims.

At no point was I scared as we were trying to save people from a dreadful situation. Normally when we firefight, there is no risk of a gun fight. This was different. My experience of 16 years was put to the test and I am glad that I could save people from that height of the building. Our work was appreciated.

I only managed to talk to my family the next day. They were worried, but it was all OK. I received many letters after the incident and still receive messages from some people we saved. Initially, I thought a lot about it for a few days, but now I think of the 26/11 attacks only when someone gets in touch with me.

Though that night was horrible and something like this should never happen, I feel God gave me this chance to do this good deed by saving so many people. In that way, I am lucky that it was done through me. **RAGINI SHARMA, RAILWAYS EMPLOYEE**

Even in the worst of times one hopes that nothing will happen to your loved one. We also hoped and prayed that my husband SK Sharma was OK when the news of attacks started coming in. He was a ticket inspector at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station.

He was a kind and honest person. He liked to help everyone and he died trying to save a little girl. He could have taken cover and stayed inside, but he chose to help passengers even when the firing was going on.

I have been looked after because we live in a joint family and my children have coped. My son was sitting an important examination and has done well. But I know how much he has suffered.

I had never worked before I was given this railway job as part of the compensation. I think work keeps me occupied. I visit the station every day but what I really think about is that the railways did not recognise him as a martyr. We had to convince the authorities about the kind of pension we were entitled to.

Nothing can fill the void but as a family we feel that when someone goes beyond the call of duty, then adequate respect and recognition is the least his family should get.

We have started a foundation which will hold drawing and painting competitions. We will use the compensation money to give prizes to the brave youth, youth who have done good work, and winners of painting competitions in schools.

I just want all the good work that he did all his life to be carried forward. And I hope my children recover and carry on with what my husband stood for. **ISRAEL ANSARI, TAXI DRIVER**

We lost everything we had in Mumbai. I have shifted back to my village in Bihar because I simply cannot imagine living in the city where my brothers died in the attacks.

Eleven of our family members were at the CST station and we lost six of them. I was parking my taxi and before I could figure out what was happening, the gunmen had done their job. Everything we had was wiped out in no time.

My elder brother Ilyas Ansari had helped us settle when we came to Mumbai to earn a living. Without him, it is not possible to live there. Whatever this city gave us, much more was snatched away from us. Now I have to look after the family and worry about the future of my brothers' children too.

We have been through many difficulties since the attacks and it is impossible to forget what happened that night at the CST station. It will always stay with us.

Four of my brothers and two other family members were gunned down. How can a family cope with this? We have received compensation but we were told that four family members will get jobs with the railways. Nothing has happened so far.

We take each day as it comes. Up to now I have spent most of my time completing formalities to secure compensation. Women cannot do this running around. I feel exhausted but we do not have much choice. **BABLU KUMAR DEEPAK, ANNOUNCER AT RAILWAY STATION**

I was on a 3pm-11pm shift that night. At about 9.45pm we saw black smoke coming from platform number 13. The gunmen crossed platforms 13, 12 and 11 and were firing indiscriminately. They were going towards the section from where suburban trains leave.

A train had just arrived at the station and I knew that a big crowd would get off. I immediately announced that everyone should use the rear exit instead of the main exit. I also informed the other announcer as the gunmen went towards the suburban area.

From my work place I have a full view of the station so I could see what they did. We stayed in our cabin with lights off till the gunmen went out and then we started helping people on the platform.

I have been coming here since then and there are times when I still think of that night. Even now I feel scared when I remember those moments. It was a difficult time and my family was worried for me. I have a daughter who is only eight.

I was given 500 rupees (\$10) and a certificate by my department for my timely announcements. Sometimes I wish the government had recognised my presence of mind and how my announcements helped. I have laminated the 500-rupee note and feel good about what I did.

I come to the same station every day and work in the same office. It is not easy to wipe out those memories but one has to get on.

SANJAY GOVILKAR, POLICEMAN

I was at home when I heard about the attacks. As soon as we got a call about multiple attacks in the city we were asked to go to work. I was at Girgaum Chowpatty when we were informed on the wireless that the gunmen had hijacked a car and were coming our way. Soon we saw the car coming towards us. When we tried to stop it, it went past us but got stuck in the road divider. What happened after that is a blur as it happened in a matter of minutes.

Qasab [the sole surviving gunman, now on trial in India] was sitting next to the driver. The other gunman fired as my colleague Tukaram Ombale and I leapt towards Qasab. Qasab fired too and Ombale sustained several bullet injuries. I too had a bullet injury, but we managed to capture him alive. I knew that Qasab had to be kept alive. I was in hospital for over a month, and later I went to court to identify Qasab.

When I learnt about anti-terrorism chief Hemant Karkare's death, I felt very sad. I used to look up to him. We lost the best of our men that night. I don't know how I survived but I do believe in God. Anything could have happened during that encounter.

Fortunately I have a large network of friends and a very supportive wife. She is stronger than me emotionally. So I could deal with the sense of loss. I do not feel that police can be armed like army soldiers. We are meant to help out citizens with everyday issues. That night we fought Qasab and Ismail with sticks.

Everyone praised us and I feel that people's attitude towards the Mumbai police has become positive. However, I do not want to rest on past glory. One has to move on and strive all the time. I wish people from all religions would come together and stay united in these difficult times. **DR SANJAY CHATTERJEE, BOMBAY HOSPITAL**

We initially thought it was a gang war when news of firing incidents came in. But as patients started arriving, the enormity of the situation revealed itself. We conducted at least 30 to 40 surgeries in one night.

We formed a team of doctors who did triage so that patients were taken depending on the kind of injuries they had sustained.

There was no time to think when it was all happening. We were completely overwhelmed and were doing our best to save as many as possible. All the departments of the hospital worked to their best and as we had enough blood in the bank we could perform all the surgeries.

We did manage to save most of the injured and some of them kept coming to me later for treatment as they required multiple surgeries. I have kept in touch with some patients - which won't happen in normal circumstances. As medical professionals we do see a lot of cases but that night was different. We just kept working until the next morning.

We even heard rumours that gunmen were roaming in the city in a police van. I wonder if the security systems in the city have improved since then.

BHISHAM MANSUKHANI, MEDIA PROFESSIONAL

I was stuck in the Taj hotel on 26/11 and was rescued the next morning. Walking out of the Taj, I should have felt a great sense of relief. But I didn't. All I felt was infinite gratitude towards the Taj staff and the National Security Guard commandos.

At this point, it's all about taking those small steps, the most important of which is to keep the incident as real and immediate in my mind. A lot of people died during these attacks and those fortunate to survive have a responsibility towards them.

That morning, some time past 3.30am when the evacuation went horribly wrong and a few of us, my mother included, were cooped up in the Lavender Room of the Chambers, I braced myself for death. I was too blank to begin regretting not having done the many things I had complacently put off for the future.

I do remember desperately trying to keep myself from weeping. It would have amounted to nothing but a dangerous noise that might have given everyone away.

Six hours later, when we were rescued, I couldn't coax myself into elation. Death is the only guarantee and there's no telling when I would have to bring myself to accept it again. Given our current reality, it can't be too long.

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