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## Mumbai gunman's chilling confession



Only survivor ... Azam Amir Kasab.

Photo: AP, Maharashtra Times

December 14, 2008

The sole gunman captured in last month's Mumbai attacks originally intended to seize hostages and outline demands in a series of dramatic calls to the media, his confession statement to police says.

Mohammed Ajmal Kasab said he and his partner, who massacred dozens of people in the city's main train station, had planned a rooftop stand-off, but abandoned the plans because they could not find a suitable building, says the confession obtained by the Associated Press on Saturday.

Kasab's seven-page confession, given to police over repeated interrogations, offers chilling new details of the three-day rampage through India's commercial centre that left 164 people plus nine of the 10 gunmen dead.

He said the assault, which started on November 26, was initially set for September 27, though he does not explain why it was delayed. The gunmen had been told by their handlers to carry out the attacks in the morning or evening when the station is teeming with commuters.

After reaching Mumbai, Kasab and his partner, Ismail Khan, the group's ringleader, headed to the train station by taxi in the evening.

"Ismail and myself went to the common toilet, took out the weapons from our sacks, loaded them, came out of toilet and started firing indiscriminately toward the passengers," Kasab told police.

As a police officer opened fire, the two militants retaliated with grenades before entering another part of the station and randomly shooting more commuters.

The men then searched for a building with a rooftop where they had been told to hold hostages and call a contact named Chacha, whom Kasab identified as Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, the suspected mastermind behind the attacks who has been detained by Pakistani authorities.

Chacha, which means "uncle" in Hindi, would supply phone numbers for media outlets and specify what demands the two should make.

"This was the general strategy decided by our trainers," Kasab said.

Taking heavy fire from police, the two had trouble finding a "suitable building" and stormed a hospital they mistook for an apartment building. There, they searched for hostages and traded more gunfire with security forces. It's unclear if they ever held hostages.

When they left, a police van pulled up and the two tried to take shelter behind a bush during the shootout. Kasab was hit in the hand as Khan returned fire.

Police have confirmed the van was carrying top police officials, including the head of the anti-terror squad who was killed.

In the confession, Kasab, 21, describes his conversion from an aspiring street criminal to a loyal soldier for Lashkar-e-Taiba, the terrorist group banned by Pakistan in 2002 and blamed by India in the attacks.

He came to the organisation last year while looking to buy guns to commit robberies after quitting a low-paying job at a catering business. The search led him to several Lashkar "stalls" at a bazaar in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi, he said.

Kasab went on to receive rigorous training in weapons handling and other skills, attending at least six Lashkar camps and visiting his parents twice during breaks, he said.

He said they were shown "clippings highlighting the atrocities on Muslims in India", images of Mumbai locations on Google Earth, and film footage of the train station.

Kasab said Lakhvi, Lashkar's operations chief, recruited him for the Mumbai attack. After Kasab and nine others were picked among a group of 32 recruits, they headed to Karachi in September and practised travelling on speed boats.

On November 23, the group were transported to a ship called the Al-Huseini far out at sea.

Shortly after boarding, "each of us was given a sack containing eight grenades, one AK47 rifle, 200 cartridges, two magazines and one cell phone for communication", he said.

The Al-Huseini's crew, he said, later hijacked an Indian vessel, killing all but one crew member who was temporarily kept alive and held at gunpoint to guide them into Mumbai's coastal waters.

"When we were at some distance from the shore, Ismail and [another militant] killed the Indian seaman" before the group boarded a dinghy and came ashore "per the instructions received earlier".

Kasab is being held on 12 offences, including murder and waging war against the country, but has not yet been formally charged.

Islamabad has refused to acknowledge Kasab's nationality, complaining that India has yet to furnish any evidence.

## AP

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