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Why Indian Politics Is Anti-Wealth

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7 November 2009

The Untouchables

It's a police force that let the nation down on 26 November 2008. The author spent months meeting the men in uniform, from the brass to the beat constable, to get a grip on what really is wrong with the Mumbai force. The answer is a story of incompetence, political venality, corruption, lack of equipment and motivation. This is a force that has AK-47s but can't afford to load them with bullets. Yes, we need to be scared.

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SECURITY



On an overcast April morning in the compound of a police barracks in central Mumbai, a team of six men in commando clothing, armed with AK-47s and pistols, walked, crouched and lunged for our cameras. They simulated combat at close quarters: how to enter a building, guard its entrance, take control of the stairwell and burst into a room occupied by terrorists. They were members of the Quick Response Team (QRT), their existence a challenge to the cliché of a city police unprepared for the commando style attacks of last November. The QRT was created in 2003, after a series of bomb blasts in Mumbai, precisely to counter a terrorist attack. Not to guard exits or form outer cordons or manage crowds, but to engage the bad guys. They were selected from the constabulary for their youth and fitness. They trained with the Army in Pune. They went to Manesar to train with the National Security Guard (NSG). They have AK-47s, 9-mm pistols, bulletproof vests, imported helmets. They are divided into teams on multiple shifts, so that at any time of the day or night, one team of 12 commandos is always on call, 24x7.

On their biggest night, they fired only a few rounds. By dawn, they were manning outer perimeters at the Taj and Trident.

What went wrong? The answers are couched in that familiar vagueness which has come to sadly define Mumbai Police in its moment of reckoning: “We were called into action at 10 pm. A team of seven went to CST

(Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus). We went from train to train clearing compartments. We realised by then the terrorists had left the station. We were told that they had gone towards Cama Hospital. As we left, we heard firing outside Metro cinema. We saw a Qualis with guns sticking out of the window. We fired at it. But by then it sped off.”

This from the Trident team: “Six of us entered the hotel. We saw glass, blood, bodies everywhere. A grenade dropped from a higher floor as we entered. We went up to the second floor, going room by room. We didn’t know what we were looking for. We thought we’d go right to the top and start clearing the floors, but we didn’t have enough numbers. We had been split up into very small groups. So we rescued guests and guarded the exits till the Navy commandos came.”

My exchange with the QRT commandos—SI Vasave, SI Kerkar, constables Mhatre and Patil—took place in a former complex of jail cells attached to Bhoiwada police station, about 10 km north of CST. Its walls are peeling, with damp patches everywhere. One of the now-empty lockups serves as the QRT’s main command post, with a roster sketched on a blackboard, and a wireless receiver propped on a table. Flies buzz around puddles and mounds of garbage. On the iron bars of the cells, underwear and trousers are hung out to dry. This is where the city has chosen to headquarter its elite anti-terrorist force.

The QRT was orphaned almost as soon as it was created. It was meant to be part of the crime branch of the city police, but was then brought under the command of the Anti Terror Squad. The ATS itself is a bastard child—it’s raised from the Maharashtra Police, but its chief reports to the Mumbai police commissioner. That night, says SI Vasave, as they went from location to location, they had no one to guide them. The man who is meant to be in charge of the QRT, himself caught up in the anarchy, called them just as they were setting off: “This is your first chance to prove yourself,” Hemant Karkare told them. “*Kuchh kar ke dikhana hai* (Do something to show for yourself).” Two hours later, they would discover his body in a pool of blood

behind Cama Hospital.

Mumbai turns you into a crime reporter. It is home to India's most frequently fictionalised police force. The only police force where a sub-inspector (Daya Nayak) can inspire a clutch of Bollywood thrillers. The only force which has a celebrity sniffer dog: Zanjeer, the golden labrador that scented out the caches of RDX in Thane and Mumbra in 1993. Zanjeer was sent off with full honours when he died in 2000. Not long after we moved to Mumbai in 2003, on my first visit to the city's police headquarters, I lingered on the magnificent wooden staircase that leads to the commissioner's office. The wall was a gallery of the city's khaki celebrities: Ribeiro, Soman, Samra, Mendonca, Singh.

On that day, I was there to meet Commissioner RS Sharma. The Telgi stamp paper scam had just broken. Sharma and several others were charged with bungling the investigation. Over the next few weeks, more than a dozen policemen—officers like Sharma, but many others of varying ranks—were suspended, arrested and sent to jail. Later, Sharma was discharged. He said his release proved his case: that he was the victim of murky departmental rivalries. Many saw the Telgi purge as one of the worst moments in the history of the force. Worse than the 1992-93 riots, when the police was seen as nakedly communal? I asked an officer with the crime branch. Worse, he said.

In August that same year, two blasts went off in the city—one at the Gateway of India, another in Zaveri Bazaar, a crowded marketplace in central Mumbai. Fifty-four people died. Acting on the basis of a tip-off from a taxi driver, and using its network of informants, the crime branch cracked the case within two months. One of the main accused was shot in an 'encounter'. Three others were arrested. (They were recently sentenced.)

I had been in Mumbai for only six months. I already had a taste of the fame and notoriety that is the legacy of its police force. The city's first police chief, an East India Company buccaneer called James Tod, was sacked for corruption in 1790. Charles Forjett, who became Commissioner almost a

century later, was the force's first moderniser. He laid the ground for Mumbai Police's high standards of detection. Forjett was Anglo-Indian, and often moved around the city undercover, a technique he used to expose the Mumbai mutineers of 1857. The mutineers were strapped to cannons and blown to bits on the Esplanade.

The weight of so much history needs a suitable setting. Wander through the streets of south Mumbai and it's a fair chance that some of the finest Victorian and Gothic architecture is police property: the Commissioner's office in Crawford Market, the late 18th century ATS headquarters in Byculla, the Old Bazaar Gate Police Station (now the headquarters of DCP Zone 1), the Colaba police station, the Maharashtra Police Head-quarters at Apollo Bunder, a grand old Gothic pile of blue basalt. All these buildings are a stone's throw away from the Taj, CST, Cama Hospital, Leopold's, Nariman House. Indeed, the terrorists had wandered into the heart of police Mumbai. As the gunmen killed, lingered, reloaded, and killed again, they would unravel the reputation—and the troubled core—of the country's most celebrated police force.

There is a story the officers of Mumbai police like to tell: of brotherhood, risk and the fight against evil. But it is a story that unfolds far away from Mumbai, in the jungles of Vidharbha. Many officers on the 'frontlines' of 26/11 had done postings, often overlapping, in Maharashtra's Naxal-affected districts. This, I am told again and again, is not a coincidence. "You see who was the first to rush to the spots that night." Hemant Karkare (SP Chandrapur, 1991), Sadandand Date (ASP Bhandara, 1995) and Ashok Kamte (ASP Bhandara, 1991) were at Cama, Deven Bharati (ASP Gadchiroli, 1996) and Hemant Nagrale (ASP Chandrapur, 1992) were at the Taj, Parambir Singh (SP Bhandara, 1995) at the Trident, KP Raghuvanshi (SP Gadchiroli, 1992) at CST. "You get that killer instinct when you are in the jungle. We used to sleep with our AKs," one of them tells me. In the context of the November attacks, this may seem ironic, even mildly absurd. But this is a force looking for redemption. The successes of Maharashtra's police force in containing Naxalism in Vidharbha in the early to mid 90s are

generally undisputed, unlike 26/11. There is a nostalgia for that time in the forest; many of them straight out of the academy, thrust into a sort of Boy's Own world of adventure, away from the politics of headquarters.

When I met Hemant Karkare for the first time in August last year, the walls of his office were mounted with tastefully polished driftwood in interesting shapes—a crucifix, a stag's head—picked up from the jungles of Chandrapur. That evening he was incensed. Both the ATS and Crime Branch were chasing a key informant, a car thief called Afzal Usmani, a crucial link to the Mumbai module of the Indian Mujahideen (IM). The IM had been accused of a series of bomb blasts across India in 2008. The Crime Branch got to him first. Usmani led them to the entire local IM module, and then, when the ATS asked for his custody, he 'vanished'. The IM case had gone out of the ATS's hands. (The Crime Branch says they had nothing to do with the disappearance of the informant.)

Karkare wanted to complain to the Director General of Police, AN Roy. But Roy was fighting his own battles. His status as DGP faced legal challenges. And, going by the buzz in police circles, he was said to be locked in a factional war with Commissioner Hassan Gafoor. Roy's admirers found Gafoor uncommunicative and bureaucratic. Gafoor's supporters claimed that Gafoor was competent, but less publicity-seeking than Roy.

Then, in October last year, the ATS began arresting Hindu radicals for the bomb blasts in the Muslim majority town of Malegaon, and Karkare was attacked by the BJP and Shiv Sena. He went into a shell. I finally managed to get him to agree to an interview in the last week of November. He was upset but restrained. But he was more emotional in the company of his IPS batchmate, KL Prasad, Mumbai's Joint Commissioner for Law and Order, whom he had gone to meet on the night of 26/11. The Shiv Sena had called for a bandh to protest the Malegaon arrests. "Hemant was very down," Prasad recalls. "I tried to cheer him up by cracking bawdy jokes. Hemant had a more intellectual sense of humour. I tried to pull his leg, 'Hemant, we are not like you. We are *ganvaars* (villagers)'. But he was too depressed."

Prasad was not in the best of moods himself. His long-running tensions with Gafoor were well known. On the night of the attacks, the legatees of Forjett were not a happy family.

By general consensus, it appears that the national malaise of political interference, venality and factionalism gained momentum amongst the Mumbai police about 15 years ago, during the state's first coalition government. The home department, under the Chief Minister, was brought under the newly created post of the Deputy Chief Minister. This gave a new vigour to the usual commerce of transfers and postings, first under the Sena-BJP alliance, and later under successive Congress-NCP regimes. According to Julio Ribeiro, it was the beginning of the end. "The chain of command has been broken. Now, even an inspector will go directly to Mantralaya for his posting." Ribeiro was Commissioner in the early 80s. He says he received only one application for a posting from the office of CM Vasantdada Patil, which he turned down. Today, flagrant displays of some 'political nexus' or the other are common. An officer tells me how in some parts of the city, "Inspectors roam openly with MLAs. We can't do anything."

But the current factionalism is given a more sinister reading. In post-Raj Thackeray Mumbai, a member of the Gafoor camp suggests that the faction wars are based on resentment against a "clique of non-Maharashtrian officers who are ruling the roost" (a reference to AN Roy's group), that the rank and file are angry with this clique, and that even Maharashtrian IPS officers are "upset by their high-handed behaviour". The idea of a largely Maharashtrian constabulary, protecting a city of 'outsiders', resentful of their non-Maharashtrian IPS superiors has a certain devious potential. It's the kind of conspiracy theory that Raj Thackeray's MNS could have dreamt up, except I am hearing it from a police officer! But empirically it makes no sense. I ask around if the insider-outside virus has infected the police. Mercifully, there are few takers. I am pointed to other ways in which parochialism has reared its head. Two successive home ministers of the Maratha caste—RR Patil and Jayant Patil—have fuelled accusations of caste

bias in vital city postings. (I ask one of my crime reporters to do a spot poll: how many DCPs are of the Maratha caste? The answer: seven of the city's 12 DCPs are Marathas).

The communal taint of 1992. Parochialism in 2009. Mumbai is an island. Its police force is not.

The walls of Assistant Sub Inspector Robert Pinto's flat are in bloom. There is a vivid patch of green algae growing out of the balcony wall. Next to the kitchen, a thick outcrop of shrubbery has forced itself out of a crack. How long, I ask, pointing to the weeds. He shakes his head. Too long. From his balcony, we overlook the concrete sprawl of the police's Motor Transport (MT) yard in Byculla. From above, the roofs of the police cars—Qualis, Boleros, Indicas—look like crushed eggshells. Kids run around puddles. Around the three sides of the MT Yard are blocks of police flats, built in the early 60s. Each flat is about 100 sq ft. There is a common block of bathrooms and one wash area on the far end of each floor. As we approach the building, we see a giant poster of Vijay Khandekar, the wireless operator who died on the steps of Cama. A small crowd surrounds us. They think we are here to meet his family. We say we have come to look at how ordinary policemen live. Hands tug at us, pulling us up the stairs. We are taken inside one of the flats. "Look, look at the cracks on the ceiling." Chunks of plaster have fallen away, exposing rusted iron pipes. Forty years after it was built, the bones of the building lie exposed. "It's worse in my flat." "No, mine is worse." The flats are crammed, even on a weekday afternoon. There are parents, grandparents, children, cousins visiting from Sholapur to look for work in the city.

The residents of the MT Yard flats still count themselves as the lucky ones. Space is a luxury in Mumbai, even for the city's guardians. (Various proposals to increase housing for the constabulary gather dust. The post of the DG Housing is seen as a dead end, or a parking lot where you await rehabilitation. It's where Gafoor is sent, for his omissions on 26/11 night.) For the roughly 40,000-strong force, there are less than 20,000 livable

flats. The rest get a housing allowance, which varies according to rank. A PSI, for instance, gets Rs 3,500 a month. That can get you a room in a slum. “Take Behrampada,” an officer told me, a teeming slum in Bandra. “It’s just rows and rows of three-storied tin sheds, about three feet apart. How are you going to police that?” There are constables who probably live in Behrampada. It is a strange notion: cops and potential sleeper cells, living in cramped proximity.

In one of the flats, a girl of about 14 is conducting math tuitions for kids from her building. The floor is swarming with 8-year-olds. She is giggling, excited by the cameras. “Would you join the police?” I ask her. She laughs and shakes her head. Later, I put that question to constable Amit Chitle, who was shot in the leg at the Taj. We are at his home in the rundown BDD chawls in Worli, tenements built for mill workers. Now it is that rare thing: a low-income housing block in the heart of the city. Amit is second-generation police. The flat was allotted to his father. When we meet him, he is wearing shorts; the scars from the bullet wound are visible. Amit still seems in mild shock, ill at ease with the attention that his ‘heroism’ has brought him. On the wall is pinned a photograph from his college days, when he aspired to be an MBA student. Will you go back to work, I ask. He darts a glance at his mother. Lose the job, lose the house. Why not, his mother says. He can always find something less risky.

SI Prakash Shishupal waves us into the Azad Maidan police station. Kasab and Ismael, after the massacre at CST, had walked past the back entrance of this police station before they entered Cama Hospital. When he heard they were coming, Shishupal locked up the back gate, switched off his phone and vanished for the rest of the night. He has since been transferred. But on the day we met him, he was still station boss. Spread out on his desk were rosters and call sheets. The DCP of his region wants visible policing. This means extra shifts for his beat constables and PIs, who already work 12-to-14-hour days. “The DCP wants more people on the road. People should see the police.” Do you have enough men, I ask. “We are running short every day.” The city has swelled since Forjett’s time, but its khaki ranks have not

kept pace. Forty thousand to protect 20 million. Even so, he says without irony, his is the “No 1 police station in Maharashtra”. The sanctioned strength of the station is 365 men. They have 245. That still makes them better than the rest.

Attached to the police station is what is called, rather optimistically, a Striking Mobile. Many of them were despatched on the night of the attacks. We ask to see one. A Mahindra Bolero pulls up. A SI rank policeman springs out, hastily jamming on his helmet, and clutching an SLR. Others emerge, carrying carbines. They arrange themselves for the cameras. How old, I ask, pointing at the SLR. About 25-30 years. When did you last fire it? They glance at one another nervously. It was an unfair question. Everyone knows that there are no bullets. An ATS officer had explained the rules: when you fire a bullet, you account for it. He had seen his men at encounters, even after the fugitive had escaped, on hands and knees, looking for spent shells. I think of the other iconic image of the night, from the gunfight at CST: constable Jillu Yadav fires his .303 musket at Kasab and Ismail, finds it jammed, and out of sheer frustration hurls a plastic chair in their direction. They have AK-47s, we have garden furniture.

“We were sitting ducks.” I am sitting with one of the officers who was part of the Taj operations. It’s been a strange nine months for anyone on the 26/11 beat, playing part-reporter, part-amateur shrink to a befuddled police force. The transition from the first few weeks of fame—memorials, tributes, awards, TV ‘specials’—to ignominy has been disorienting. The rivalries pre-dating the attacks have spread like a virus. All the actions of the night—both heroism and failure—threaten to be coloured by conspiracy theories. Several versions surface, depending on which ‘camp’ one is talking to, of who was brave and who wasn’t. Who fired and who didn’t. Who was genuinely injured and who faked an injury to get on the Gallantry list.

About the only act of daring on which there is consensus—other than Constable Omble grappling with Kasab at the barricades on Marine Drive—is Sadanand Date at Cama. With his receding hairline and

soft-spoken ways, Date could pass for a somewhat athletic college professor. (Julio Ribeiro cautions against being fooled by his appearance: “Date is very tough”.) Date, who like many others that night was outside his jurisdiction—he is the Additional CP of Mumbai’s East Region, Cama falls in the South Region—says that he met the seven policemen he rounded up and led to battle for the first time at the hospital. He’s been asked many times about what possessed him to hunker down in a darkened stairwell, as Kasab and Ismail lobbed a series of grenades at him and his men. With each burst, he took a hit—he was wounded in his leg and eye. But he didn’t retreat, and kept firing. Date still has a grenade fragment lodged in his right iris. He is matter-of-fact: “There were people crying out for help. I am a policeman. What else could I do?”

It doesn’t help that there is no official police narrative—because Gafoor inexplicably (or perhaps wisely) didn’t order a single post-mortem into the biggest debacle in the history of Mumbai police. Instead, parallel reconstructions mushroom in the media, fed by internal leaks. A number of 26/11 quickies hit the market. The family of Ashok Kamte, slain in the attacks, carries out their own investigation of the events at Cama Hospital. And there is the slow daily grind of the Kasab trial, throwing up sanitised bulletins of the events of the night.

Much of what emerges points to banal, devastating truths. Lost nerves. A city police fighting army-trained terrorists. Occasional bursts of raw courage, or risk, or both. But for the most part, an almost surreal inertia. The great quiet.

The facts have been complicated by the fog of politics and self-preservation. Information has become schizophrenic. There is too much of it, more than of any terrorist attack—wireless records, eyewitness accounts, still photographs, media footage, CCTV footage, intercepted calls—and yet too little. Some of the biggest mysteries of the night remain unexplained. A Himalayan sized gap exists, even now, between the versions of the control room and those calling for backup. Take Cama Hospital, for instance, where

a bleeding Sadanand Date had sent repeated messages for help between 11:13 and 11:50 pm. None came. This allowed Kasab and Ismail, who spent 40 minutes killing and shooting, to walk out of the hospital unchallenged. Go by the control room version, and about 130 cops were sent to Cama between 10:30 pm and midnight!

At the Taj, there weren't more than a dozen policemen inside the hotel engaging the terrorists in any serious manner until 2 am, when the Navy commandos came. But the control records indicate about 120 men were sent to the Taj between 10:15 pm and midnight. Where was everyone? "We came. We took positions. We guarded exits. We saved hostages." The last is probably true. Hundreds of people were rescued from the Taj and Trident. But why didn't anyone directly take on the terrorists? I asked an officer who was holed up inside the Taj's CCTV room, watching the terrorists enter a room on the sixth floor and not leave it for almost 3 hours. He says he wanted to attack but got contradictory instructions from different superiors, first a call from a senior saying, "Charge the bastards. They have killed our people," and then, minutes later, another call from another senior saying Navy commandos were on their way. "Let one agency handle it," he was told. (One of Gafoor's supporters says the strategy was to "evacuate the injured, rescue the trapped, and pin down the terrorists till the backup came. That's what we did, and it worked".)

The government committee to investigate the police response to the attacks only reveals frustration, buck-passing, factional rivalry and need for catharsis. Most of the testimonies are critical of Gafoor, fewer of AN Roy. Gafoor is accused of only talking to his clique of officers during the operations. (Gafoor camp: "That's because the other officers didn't take Gafoor's calls.") Of camping outside the Trident instead of being in the control room. (Gafoor camp: "The Standard Operating Procedure says the control room should be manned by the DCP Operations, not the Police Commissioner.") Of failing to motivate his men to charge the terrorists. ("The NSG took three days. So why blame the police?"). Of not conducting a post-mortem of the police response. ("A debriefing happens only in the

Army.”) And so on.

In the first session of the Maharashtra Assembly after the 26/11 attacks, held in Nagpur, Gopinath Munde of the opposition BJP began his statement to the house by saying that he had been “briefed by both factions of the police force”. The opposition alleged that there is a “gang war” within the force, borrowing a term from the battle within the underworld. A celebrated police officer of the original war against the Mumbai mafia, who was present in the visitor’s gallery, says he was sickened. He says he wanted to take off his uniform and never wear it again. Ever.

There is a new bustle around the police headquarters at Crawford Market. The new Commissioner wants things done in a hurry. “If we are attacked today,” D Sivanandan said the day he took over, “We are ready to retaliate.” This is, of course, hyperbole. On the day he makes the statement, nothing has arrived: no weapons, no bulletproof vests, no patrol cars. “For the past nine months,” an officer tells me, “all we did is push paper. Now finally we are on the move.”

The Commissioner has his share of critics. He was the head of the state intelligence during the attacks. Sivanandan, charismatic, always smiling, laughs off the charges. “How is the state CID meant to know about terrorists from Pakistan?!”

While the force waits for modern assault rifles from the US, 50 AK-47s have been borrowed from the BSF (Sivanandan likes to improvise). Two hundred bulletproof vests are on their way from Delhi. He wants a dozen bomb disposal squads, up from the existing three. The number of dog squads will go up from 5 to 100. For every two police stations, there will be a six-man team, trained and armed with new weaponry and bulletproof vehicles, ready to respond at short notice. “Your friendly neighbourhood commandos!” says an officer with a laugh. There will be CCTVs on every street corner like London and Vienna. Nineteen amphibious vehicles have been ordered from Canada. They can be used to protect the city from seaborne attacks. But it is more likely that they will make a less dramatic

debut during Ganesh *visarjan* (immersion). Will all of this come through, I ask. “Well, at least Sivanandan is trying. He is banging on every door. We are now holding meetings every day.”

The new weapons finally arrive in the last weeks of August. Smith and Wesson pistols, Heckler and Koch sub-machine guns, Colt grenade launchers: this is a city gearing up for a mini-war. It’s another matter that the threats are more likely to be homegrown: a sleeper cell that gets activated, or the street thuggery of Mumbai’s political chauvinists. But this is not a time for doubt. The image of the force has taken a dent; it’s time to display a modern, heavily armed, professional front. All the humdrum worries of city policing—murders, burglaries, Ganesh, vacancies, transfers, postings—take a temporary back seat.

But it is an election year, and the whiff of political opportunism has grown stronger. I am given an example: all DCP-level postings within Mumbai are no longer the prerogative of the police chief—they are decided directly in Mantralaya. A disgraced officer has been brought back as the DCP of Zone 8 near the airport because his family has a connection with Maharashtra’s minister of state for home. Another ‘black sheep’ has used political influence to become DCP of Zone 11, in the suburbs. The DCPs are a vital link in the city’s chain of power. The Mumbai police is a 40,000-strong force. But as one of the officers explained to me, “The city is run by the Commissioner, the DCP, and the Senior PI—the station boss. That is the real pyramid of power.” The problem is, the politicians know it too.

The new home minister, who replaced RR Patil, sacked after the Mumbai attacks for claiming that the terrorists killed “only 150 people”, is ironically not seen as competent. It is rumoured that the police department is now being shadow-controlled by its old nemesis, Chaggaan Bhujbal, the state’s minister for public works. Bhujbal was sacked as home minister in 2003 during the Telgi stamp paper scam. His regime, it is almost universally held, corrupted the Mumbai police like never before. Today, he is the head of the group of ministers to modernise the police force!

Election-year politics, it is whispered, is behind the surprise appointment of SS Virk as the state's DGP in place of AN Roy. Virk has been out of Maharashtra for 23 years, on deputation to Punjab. At the end of his tenure, he was arrested on charges of corruption, released on bail, and later removed as DGP Punjab by the Election Commission. His resurrection by the Maharashtra government, it is believed, traps him in obligation to the masters of Mantralaya. But Virk was an 'action' figure in his own right. He was hit on the jaw by a bullet during Operation Black Thunder. He says, as IG CRPF in 1986, he built a formidable network of informants in Amritsar and Jalandhar. "Ten days before he was assassinated, I met Sardar (Chief Minister) Beant Singh. I told him within a month you will be blown up by a human bomb and you won't be able to do anything about it." It has been, to put it mildly, an eventful career.

The day I meet him in his office, though, he has a vision—of higher magazine circulation. As DG Punjab, he says he distributed thousands of copies of the police in-house magazine, *Darpan*, across the countryside. "It is important," he said, "to heal the psyche." He wants to do the same for Maharashtra. The circulation of the police magazine, *Dakshata*, is only 6,000. He says he will raise it to 18,000. "We will release it, and just watch. The people will do the rest." I ask him if he is out of touch with Maharashtra police. He answers this by speaking to his orderly in fluent, but oddly-accented Marathi. During his time in Punjab, he was given several chances to transfer from his home cadre to his home state, a rare opportunity in the All India Services. "But I never took it," he says. "I always wanted to come back." Why, I ask. "Because in Punjab, if you call a constable a *bhenchod*, he will take it. But here, in Mumbai, he won't. This is a force which has pride in the uniform. It is always better."

I called up one of the boys from the QRT the other day. They have scattered now; some guarding VIP installations, others posted to the Kasab trial. They are bemused by all the activity—the new NSG hubs, the neighbourhood commandos. The last time we met, he had said he was kept awake by an

aural memory: the terrible clatter of AK-47s echoing inside a deserted hotel. No longer, he says. “All of us sleep better. But we are more alert: *ab koi risk nahin lene ka hai* (We’re not taking any risks now).” Where are you, I ask. He says he is stationed at the Taj, in a sandbagged bunker looking out towards the harbour, where already in the feverish imagination of the city’s politicians, the next boatload of stealthy invaders will falter against the foot of a towering statue of a medieval warrior king, rising 300 feet high from the Arabian Sea.

Sreenivasan Jain is Managing Editor, NDTV 24X7. He has been living in Mumbai since 2003.

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Saw the link to this fine article in The Siege. It ought not to have been beyond the capacity of the Mumbai Police to take on ten young boys from Pakistan, no matter how well trained or armed.

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Fantastic! It did manage to touch every single raw nerve associated with the Mumbai Police and the night of 26/11. The tale of Mumbai's protectors certainly has some aura to it. A story of bravery, cowardice and politics all rolled into one.

Very well written.

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A very well-written and brilliantly informative article. It suggests the writer has done months of hard work before sitting down to write this piece. Its time the incompetent politicians realise their follies and work towards strengthening the Mumbai Police.

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