

Far from the rising sun

It was another day in the life of Mumbai. However, nobody would have guessed what this day was bringing for them. Far from the sunrise and the din of an everyday life, 'terror' was to author a new chapter in Mumbai's story so far. The Taj Mahal hotel in Mumbai was one of the places attacked by terrorists on Wednesday, November 26, 2008.

Endless

Life seemed to have taken an absolutely hideous turn. Mumbai was witnessing one of the worst terrorist attacks in the history of India. From 9:15 pm onwards, the attacks began- and this was to develop at a pace that seemed endless and never tiring. Here's a map showing areas which came under the terrorists' attack.

To begin with

The night of November 26, 2008, was to be a night that will be quite unforgettable. For it was then that terror would strike and take on with complete surprise. At 9:15 pm, Leopold Cafe in Colaba was attacked first when five terrorists came at the cafe and opened fire.

And after that...

At 9:20 pm, two men came on a scooter at Nariman house, near the Bootleggers Pub in Colaba and hurled grenade at a nearby petrol pump. The grenade missed the petrol reservoir but destroyed the facade of station. After hurling the grenade, the terrorists ran into Nariman House building behind petrol pump, which is a Jewish residential building. The terrorists murdered two people there.

A few terrorists then remained holed up silently for hours. They surfaced again in the morning and hold people hostage and the hostage drama still continues.

Four minutes later...

At 9:24 pm suspected terrorists opened indiscriminate firing near the railway station, the headquarters of the Central Railway, which remains crowded almost throughout the day. Hurling grenades and firing at the people, the terrorists left many injured. Death too shattered many families. The hours that followed were harbingers of fear, loss and hopelessness.

A day in the life of the 'Taj'

Away from guests and staff, suave welcomes and prompt services, the Taj, was to experience some visitors on November 26, 2008. Visitors who walked calmly through the service door of the Taj, stormed the hotel and opened fire. They also hurled grenades at the people. Major portions of the hotel have been destroyed by fire. Many were evacuated and rescued; although some are still held hostage in the hotel. For the next two days, a dangerous encounter follows between the commandos and terrorists, in trying to free hostages- explosions and gunshots shaking India's financial capital.

Trident on fire

It was Trident's turn. At 9:35 pm, on Wednesday, Mumbai's Trident hotel came under attack when terrorists stormed the hotel. A number of people were trapped inside the hotel. Terrorists were flushed out in the operation. Many innocent lives were lost in this incident.

Now, at Ville Parle

At 9.55 pm, a taxi blast rocked Ville Parle leaving three dead. The taxi's debris were lying around. Wednesday night, was the beginning of a doom. As if, the sun had set on Mumbai, awaiting a forced summon.

Holed up at the Cama hospital

The terrorists seem to have left no stones unturned. After Ville Parle, they attacked Cama hospital at 10:15 pm and were holed up there till policemen shot them dead and got it cleared.

After the Cama hospital encounter, the police sources have confirmed five people are dead including one police Inspector, two Constables and two watchmen.

With such unprecedented attacks all over Mumbai, sleep would not come easy.

At 10:30 pm

At 10:30 pm a major gunbattle broke out near the Metro cinema, just down the road. Terrorists hijacked a police van and fired indiscriminately.

Girgaum attack

At the Girgaum Chowpatty area, two terrorists opened fire after police confronted them at 10:50 pm.

At 10:45 on Wednesday night

Amidst the other shocking attacks in Mumbai, Wadi Bunder, was next in line. There was a blast in a taxi in which 15-16 people were injured in the vicinity. The driver of the taxi is dead.

Faces of terror

These are the terrorists, who are behind the terror attacks in Mumbai on Wednesday night. At least 100 people have been killed and about 240 injured in a series of well-coordinated attacks in the city.

Men who could have gone a different way perhaps; men, who could have been the reason for giving life to someone- instead, they choose hatred? Why, is the question that comes to mind, everytime one sees the deeds they do. Is there an end to this hatred?

Left injured

Mumbai was shaken with terrorist attacks on Wednesday. It was sinister and almost spread doom across the city. The aftermath of the blasts saw the injured taken to GT

hospital. From the north to the south of the metropolis, there was panic- a feeling that was to extend over the next two days.

Armed with ammunition

It was an attack, the motive behind which is not immediately clear. An attack that targetted luxury hotels, a railway station and many other places, wounding an innumerable number of people and leaving others dead. Grenades and guns were also found from many of the sites. It's been two days since Wednesday, the battle goes on, and the sounds of the gun firing come raw to the ears, still. While a few have been evacuated, hostages still remain trapped, in some of the sites.

Together in distress

Amidst crisis of any kind, it is only hope that sustains. Distress is not for long when one has the shoulders to lean on. In experiencing one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in India, which took as hostage not only Indians but foreign nationals- perhaps, the world knows, what it is to be together in distress.

In this picture, unidentified guests of The Taj Hotel comfort each other in an ambulance after they were rescued from the hotel in Mumbai, India, on Thursday, November 27, 2008.

We salute the hero

Terrorism summons death. It's tried and has been tested. And so goes the story when on Wednesday night the Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad's chief Hemant Karkare was gunned down when he was leading an operation at Mumbai's Taj Hotel against terrorists on Wednesday. He was hit by three bullets in his chest.

A life that perhaps should have never gone- but such are the designs of destiny.

Security check at Taj

Security has been on its toes. It's been hours since the encounter started and still the terror attack seems not to have reached a finale.

Indian police, right, stand guard as hotel staff check papers of people entering the Taj Mahal hotel in New Delhi, India, on November 27, 2008. Teams of gunmen stormed luxury hotels, a popular restaurant, a crowded train station and a Jewish group's headquarters, killing people, and holding Westerners hostage in coordinated attacks on the nation's commercial center Mumbai.

Taking up position

It seemed like a never ending journey- the kerfuffle between the security and the terrorists stood like a lump in the throat, as people of hostages stood apprehensive awaiting news of their near and dear ones at the Taj. Confusion and commotion seemed to gain momentum in time.

In this picture, members of India's paramilitary Rapid Action Force take position outside the Taj Mahal Hotel on Thursday. A trickle of bodies and hostages emerged from a luxury hotel as Indian commandos tried to free people trapped by suspected Muslim militants who attacked at least 10 targets in India's financial capital of Mumbai.

History in flames...

It is often said- glory doesn't last. It fades away or is lost with time. The Taj Mahal hotel was an example of one such glory.

The terrorist attack on Mumbai will leave the Taj scarred as Thursday saw smoke and flames rising from one of the wings of the Taj Palace Hotel, as also reflected in car window, in Mumbai, India, on Thursday, November 27, 2008.

Back to life

The busy city of Mumbai seems to have been usurped by the horror of terrorism. It's shocked and shaken amidst the gunbattle, heavy police presence and apprehension about the lives of hostages.

Here we see an unidentified guest coming out of the Taj Hotel on Thursday, on November 27, 2008.

Geared to combat terror...

From Wednesday night through Thursday, Mumbai was in the grasp of fear and confusion- a feeling of apprehension that was to continue till the next day.

Here, an armed Indian security person watches from a window of the Taj Hotel in Mumbai, India, on Thursday, November 27, 2008.

Taken

It was like flood- sudden and hard to fathom. Till now, at least 125 have been killed in the Mumbai encounter, including 14 policemen and six foreigners and 327 people have been injured.

Here, a terrorist attack victim's body is shifted to an ambulance to be taken for postmortem outside the St. Georges Hospital in Mumbai.

Held by terror

It seemed like a helpless situation where the terrorists took total control of the Nariman House amongst other attack sites; and after 45 hours of operation, on Friday, November 28, 2008, the grenades and gun shots were replaced by sounds of cheers for the commandos. However, the operation was far from over.

Here, a man looks on from an adjoining building of Nariman Bhawan, where suspected militants have taken hostage Jewish families, at Colaba, Mumbai.

Bidding the last adieu

People gather at Balasaheb Bhosale's funeral in Mumbai, India, on November 27, 2008. Balasaheb Bhosale was a police official who died during an anti-terror operation at a railway station. To the many lives lost in the Mumbai terror combat, we bid a heartfelt adieu.

Free, at last

At the sight of life, it is a relief that comes as a whiff of fresh air. Away from the choked feeling of uncertainty.

Free at last, some guests of Hotel Taj come out after rescued from the clutches of terrorists in Mumbai on Thursday, November 27, 2008.

Leaving behind horror...

Few guests at the Taj Mahal hotel are rescued by unidentified persons in Mumbai, India, Thursday, November 27, 2008.

But the feeling of relief would have to be shortlived since even after some hostages were freed, dozens of people were still trapped or held captive on Thursday.

End of life

File photo of Israeli Rabbi Gabriel Holtzberg and wife Rivka. They were killed in the terror attack at the Jewish centre in Mumbai. Their two-year-old son, Moshe, managed to escape with his nanny on Friday morning.

Hidden down under

People take cover at the sound of gunfire outside The Taj Hotel in Mumbai.

Three continuous days of combat and confusion, has left the city of Mumbai cold and cramped. The battle is fully raging and nobody knows when it will stop.

Crumbling crown

In one of the worst terrorist attacks on Indian soil, the imposing dome of the Taj Mahal hotel is seen burning, in flames. The grey fire across the sky was all but saddening. The fire left the people inside the hotel screaming for help and clinging on to life as it were. Terrorists had taken control.

Pigeons fly near a flame from the Taj Hotel in Mumbai, India, on Thursday, November 27, 2008.

In the line of duty

Media and members of the public look on in the backdrop of the Gateway of India, near the Taj Mahal hotel in Mumbai, on Thursday, November 27, 2008.

The attack on Mumbai has been an ordeal and continues to be one that will be in people's minds forever.

Horror prevails

With the attack on the Taj, the very heart of Mumbai has been struck. It hurts to see the symbol of opulence which has been standing tall till now, broken and burnt. The Taj Hotel was a symbol of prosperity for Mumbai. After the terror attack, a vibrant city seems to be, for now, in deep slumber. But make no mistake, Mumbai is angry.

A long wait

Every day and every night, security personnel would lie in wait for an appropriate moment between grenade blasts and firing to inch closer to and into the still majestic Taj. In trying to bring out the terrorists and saving the hostages, the man in uniform are here-in Mumbai, India, on Thursday, November 27, 2008.

Man's best friend

Man and beast get together to wage war against terror. These are NSG commandos and sniffer dogs outside the Hotel Taj after some action against militants, in Mumbai on Thursday.

Inconsolable

The Mumbai terrorist attacks have left many homes empty. Tears do not cease to flow as the violence and hatred have crept through the lives of many an innocent. As an aftermath of it all, what remains is a life cut short.

In far away Faridabad, the grieving mother of hotel management student and trainee of Taj Hotel, Gautam Gosain [inset] is consoled by family members. Gautam, who was killed by terrorists, called his father in the wee hours of Thursday, asked him to switch on the television. And then he asked to speak to his mother.

After that, a lifetime of silence...

In search of

The wait was far from calm. With hardly any communication with the hostages inside the hotel, there were only nail-biting moments of doubt and debate crawling through the mind. This was a common picture that was seen outside the hotels, where there were fierce encounters between the security and the terrorists.

Bollywood actor Ashish Chaudhary here, stands outside the Oberoi hotel where his sister is held hostage by terrorists, in Mumbai on Thursday. At this point he did not know that his sister had died.

Out of the inferno

A guest of the Taj hotel, can't wait to come out after being rescued, in Mumbai on Thursday.

They looked on...

Local people gather to watch all the action as security personnel surround an apartment where suspected gunmen have held a family hostage in Colaba, Mumbai, India, on Thursday, November 27, 2008.

Looking for cover

Here in this picture, a local man is seen ducking for cover as he crosses an alleyway exposed to fire from alleged gunmen in Colaba.

On Friday, November 28, 2008, an official report from outside the Nariman House says the operation is "more or less over" as only one floor of the building is left to be captured. NSG commandos have come out of Nariman House amid cheering crowds. Sources say three terrorists have been killed.

Taj in flames, again

We know there were pictures before- but it takes many for it to sink in that this beautiful heritage building was gutted bit by bit.

Like a dream half- throttled, the Taj, Mumbai stands in smoke and flames.

To reach for...

On Friday, November 28, 2008, the third day of an extended battle, when repeated attempts were being made to flush out the terrorists, National Security Guard commandos came down a rope, from a helicopter to reach the top of the Nariman house, as access was becoming difficult. Security personnel were at constant war with the terrorists and after a tireless 2 day encounter, the incident ended with 2 terrorists killed and 5 hostages dead.

Remains

It's irreparable- what Mumbai is left with after the terror attacks.

Grieving the death of her two children, Sharda Janardhan Chitkar, left, is seen here consoled by a relative. As she awaits their bodies outside St. Georges Hospital in Mumbai, on Thursday, November 27, 2008, such images seem to be becoming a part of the leftovers of a war that continued to rage in the city.

Ready for action

At the door of the Taj Mahal Palace, in Mumbai, another set of soldiers get ready to risk their lives in the call of duty- on Thursday, November 27, 2008.

A helping hand

A frail old man is evacuated and taken to safety by armed personnel from the Taj Mahal Palace hotel in Mumbai, India, on Thursday. A frail old man is evacuated and taken to safety by armed personnel from the Taj Mahal Palace hotel in Mumbai, India, on Thursday.

The man, the machine

Tirelessly these men await their turn to get into action yet again in the long drawn out battle for Nariman House through the hours that followed. The encounter at Nariman House would promise to give over only to deceive.

As the clock keeps on ticking, India seems shattered by this unforgettable experience at the heart of Mumbai.

Almost over

On Friday, November 28, 2008, after a 39-hour ordeal, at the Oberoi Hotel, two AK-47 rifles, one pistol and few unexploded grenades have been seized, the NSG chief said. The Oberoi- Trident attack was a part of one of the deadliest terror attacks India has ever seen.

Here, Indian army soldiers are seen taking positions near the Oberoi hotel in Mumbai, India, Thursday, November 27, 2008.

Seeking God

Members of New York's Indian community attend the prayer service for victims of Mumbai attacks at the Hindu Temple Society of North America on Thursday.

Paying homage to the hero

During his funeral procession in Pune, on Thursday, officials carry the body of Assistant Commissioner of Police Ashok Kamte, who was killed in a gunbattle with terrorists following a series of attacks in Mumbai- one of the worst terrorist attacks that India has ever seen. Many are referring to this incident as India's 9/11.

Zeroing down

From an adjoining building of Nariman House, where suspected militants took hostage Jewish families, India's National Security Guard commandos take position- at Colaba, Mumbai, on Thursday, November 27, 2008.

On Friday, November 28, 2008, with the operation at the Nariman House almost over, 5 of the hostages in the Nariman House were found dead.

Addressing the nation

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh addresses a troubled nation on the Mumbai terrorists attacks, in New Delhi on Thursday. On Friday as a Pakistani hand was talked about, the PM asked the neighbour to send its ISI chief to answer some particular questions. In the days to come, Dr Singh has an onerous task on his hand.

On a visit

Senior BJP leader LK Advani visits CST station, where terrorists attacked on Wednesday, in Mumbai on Thursday.

Bliss, at last?

After a 39-hour ordeal, the NSG finally got success in flushing out the terrorists from the Oberoi Trident Hotel on Friday, November 28, 2008.

An unidentified British guest, center, here, is escorted by hotel staff after being rescued from Oberoi Trident Hotel where suspected militants are holed up in Mumbai, on Friday.

As Mumbai's tryst with tragedy comes to a closure, the city that bustles with life, seems to have come to a standstill- death, fear, loss and an incongruent feeling of anger and consolation is what one will have to live with.

But the question remains, where does it all end? Maybe, life will, as it has to, move on from here, but where do we go from here? Many answers are left to be answered- though the sun will rise and we will have a tomorrow- India will wake up, again. That's a hope we live with, that's the hope we live with.

Ties that bind

In an effort to save the lives trapped in the clutches of the hostile terrorists, at the Taj, many of the hostages were rescued through the windows. Blanket after blanket tied to each other became the gateway to freedom. Rather, to life. It is tragic to perceive, how even lifeless things which are a consistent, yet negligible part of our precious lives, can be the things that help us save the bonds that matter, the bonds we cherish, the bonds of love- the human bonds.

On Saturday, November 29, 2008, here's a glimpse of the Taj Hotel, after the rescue operation.

All that's left

It was a new morning for Mumbai- an end, perhaps to the continuous nightmare that lasted for literally four days. However, can we call this an end? Or a beginning of an acceptance? Acceptance- of the reality of devastation that the hateful terrorist attack in Mumbai left behind.

The devastation caused inside the Taj Hotel after the NSG and other security forces took control of it, are images- which shall always be a reminder of this reality- for now and forever.

Fallen

Grenade launchers were used to fight the terrorists at the Taj. The serene sophistication that surrounded the Taj in its glory, seemed to have been banished- to somewhere unknown. The shattered glass panes are silently fallen- holding in their wreckage the death, the blood, the pain and the hatred that engulfed the city of Mumbai in the last few days.

Hailing the Hero

It was a heart warming salute on Saturday, November 28, 2008. People stood on the roadside showering flower petals as the body of Hemant Karkare, the chief of Mumbai's Anti-Terrorist Squad, was being taken for cremation in Mumbai. He was shot dead during the Cama hospital terror attack.

As the hours pass, and Mumbai gears to wake up to a new morning, the loss of these brave officers becomes a reason- a glaring reason that makes us remember time and again how Mumbai came out of the gruesome 60 hours of the threat of death and doom.

Bereaved

Everyone is hailing him as a Hero- someone because of whom other lives were saved. However another truth that stares in the mind's eye is he was also a mother's son. A mother, to whom her son is lost, forever. The pride, the bravery, the valour will always be remembered- but the pain will stay unforgettable, irreparable.

Here, mother of Sandeep Unnikrishnan, a National Security Guards officer, who died fighting gunmen inside the landmark Taj Mahal hotel in Mumbai- touches the forehead of her son during his last rites outside his home in Bangalore, India, on Saturday, November 29, 2008. No adulation, perhaps, will ever, replace this feeling of emptiness.

Holding on

Here, a person is seen holding the uniform and hat of Hemant Karkare as his body is set to flames in Mumbai, India, on Saturday, November 29, 2008. He was among those who died in a brave attempt to fight the terror attack in the city.

On Saturday, after the 60 hour rampage that saw a tireless battle between terrorists and Indian commandos in the worst terror attack that India has seen, 183 were found dead and more than 300 injured.

The experience will remain unforgettable. But the question that repeats itself is- what for? For everyone who lost another- this will be a question that will remain unanswered. For isn't the blood I spill of another, the same that flows in me? What makes us different? What is the meaning of such a hatred that becomes so heinous?

Hope, is perhaps, the answer that we hold on to, for all times to come.

As the dusk shadows...

It's been a traumatic experience so far; the Mumbai terror attack has left everyone silent, surprised and shocked.

Words fail. The heart's torn with tears. Pride at having fought the terrorists contradicts a feeling of a disturbed loss. These last few days have been more than like an unending nightmare. And now, that it's finally over- the mind is restless, still, caressed only by togetherness.

Here, the Taj stands- alone, as if. Under the night sky, as the dusk falls, and the din and bustle of the city of dreams returns to what it was, one moves on....with an unending hope- that can never be defeated. Never.

Now

Some impressions are indellible. No matter how much time passes- some scratches and scars remain embedded in the mind's memory. From what it was, to what it is- here's a view from a burnt-out balcony of one of the suites on the top floors of the Taj Mahal Hotel.

This is what terror left behind. One of the many.

In silence

With folded hands and a heart moved, so numb- it is God, we seek. In every wrinkle of the aged hands, in every prayer behind the shuttered lips, under the night sky, there is a hidden hope, too deep to fathom.

A day after the siege at the Taj Mahal hotel, authorities were still removing corpses. It looks as if a war is over- at the same time, it feels, there is a long way to go, still. With only one question that beats, unstoppable- what for?

Listen

In the petals of the blooming flowers, in the light of the glowing candles, in every written word scrolled on paper- are things that were left unsaid. To them, who are no more, this is the only way to whisper- that we still love, we still belong. And no- hatred cannot deny us that.

At the makeshift memorial site near the Taj Hotel, in Mumbai- one now finds flowers, candles and notes. Remembrance is all that remains.

Prayer

The Mumbai terror attack has left us with gory memories. It's left us with a helplessness of loss. But it has also left us with a strength of making a change. Fighting for it, and never giving up.

And so we pray- for strength....the strength to hope, the strength to love, the strength to live and the strength to be human.