

MUMBAI UNDER SIEGE

How a Nation's Spirit Unites Across Borders

Have you ever been on Mumbai Darshan? It has 23 points of famous spots in Mumbai like Gateway of India, Sachin Tendulkar's residence, Amitabh Bachchan's residence and it now has 3 new locations

1. Oberoi Towers
2. Taj Mahal Hotel
3. Nariman House

As heavily armed militants rampaged through Mumbai, bloggers, citizen journalists and users of Twitter, the short-messaging service, provided riveting, if sometimes erroneous, accounts of the bloodshed in India's largest city. Gunmen took scores of guests hostage at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai and battled commandos inside the flagship hotel of Indian conglomerate Tata Group. Fire, water, shooting and grenade blasts during the 60-hour siege damaged the hotel, which was adorned with fine art, sculptures, chandeliers, photographs, and visitors' books signed by kings, rock stars, business barons and heads of state. Taj officials have not quantified the extent of the damage to the hotel, one of 10 sites attacked by the gunmen on November 26th through November 29th, as militants killed 179 people on a three-day rampage in the financial hub last month.

Police in Mumbai released photos of eight of the nine militants who were slain in the attack, including gruesome shots of burned or battered faces. The ninth attacker's body was too badly burned to be shown. A 10th gunman, the only one to be captured alive, was taken into custody and remains there.

All the militants were young men under the age of 30. The leader of the group was identified as 25-year-old Ismail Khan.

The fear and anger engendered by the attacks has been wholesale. Muslims worry about repercussions and future discrimination. Hindus wonder if Mumbai is forever changed. The shrinking Indian Jewish population is stunned. Tourists feel like targets.

These are some of the comments that can be seen across multiple sites on the Internet.

"Taj Hotel is a block from my house! Hostages still inside; still burning; smoke is pouring from windows."

"Front of our building is staging area for Fire Engines" and "Parents are trying to keep me inside the house."

"NOW I am MAD! Seeing the Dome of the Taj light up like a bonfire! I AM MAD! MAD! MAD!"

"NOW I am overwhelmed! Finally tears, in torrents! I am very, very sad - Arun Shanbhag teacher at Harvard - visiting India."

"Our system needs radical change, and it has to happen now. Boycott the tax payments, they can arrest 10 people for not paying taxes, what if 1 million people are not going to pay their taxes? Can we do this?" Iqbal - Bombay native

"India's seasons are characterized less by their weather and more by their fanfare. Instead of fall, there is festival season. Instead of winter, there is wedding season. During the latter, nearly every lane holds the promise of a party, with boisterous Hindi music, strings of orange marigolds ... Mumbai was in the throes of wedding season when terrorists on Nov. 26 plunged the city I live in into lockdown".



Candles are lit by people during a peace rally in front of the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai Nov. 30, 2008. (Xinhua/Reuters Photo)



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Candles and flowers placed for victims of the Mumbai attacks are seen in front of the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai Nov. 30, 2008. (Xinhua/Reuters Photo)



"There are conflicting reports about whether British and American hotel guests were singled out, but one thing is certain — the terrorists unfurled their map, picked up their thumbtacks and pricked three spots where they would be sure to kill not only Westerners, but also moneyed, upper-echelon Indians" Nichols, a pilot from Savannah, GA, who has lived in Mumbai for five months.

"They wanted the world to look. They wanted this to be our 9/11. And it is — the FBI is here, Scotland Yard is here. The world is watching." - Anitha Rao, Mumbai.

THE PEACE RALLY

After a week of simmering fury, things came to a boil on December 3rd, Wednesday, when tens of thousands of people marched in Mumbai shouting slogans.

"Throw all politicians into the Arabian Sea!" "Stop voting!" "We want army rule!"

NOTED COMMENTS

"I'm kind of glad they got the elite this time. Because the common man has been targeted so many times, and then we just move on, unaffected. At least this time, we're talking about it, and the news is covering it." - Indian microventure capitalist Megha Jindal.

"For a while we will not forget about those who came by boats. But we must always worry about those who come by votes." - An angry text-message campaign.

"The pot of anger has been filling up for a long time, but the Mumbai attack is the flash point that broke the pot," said Sanjay Nirupam, a spokesman for the ruling Congress party in Mumbai.

"I hope the next step is introspection on how to strengthen and improve the democratic system." - said Rakyesh Omprakash Mehra, who directed "Rang De Basanti."

"Mumbai won't be the same after this dreadful attack by the terrorists because the scene of the attack was the epicenter of the city where you have heritage sites like The Gateway of India and The Taj Hotel. My sympathies to those who have lost their near and dear ones and for those who are hostages. I hope peace prevails soon." - Madhur Bhandarkar.

"This is the worst attack on Mumbai. The Taj is the symbol and not just a hotel. It's a symbol of heritage and culture of Mumbai and when we saw the images of The Taj burning, it was beyond our emotions to describe the scene. This attack is as bad as 9/11. 26th November will be remembered as the darkest day in the Mumbai history. This is a time to save as many people as we can." - Kunal Kohli

"My heartfelt condolences to the family of the brave officers of the Mumbai Police who lost their lives leading from the front to take on these terrorists. Especially Hemant Karkare of the ATS who in the recent past was being targeted by various political parties for the work that he was doing. When will these politicians realize and admit that terrorists HAVE NO RELIGION? Terrorists are not Hindu or Muslim or Christian. They are not people of religion or God. They are people who have gone totally sick in their head and have to be dealt with in that manner. Hemant Karkare is an example of a brave officer who gave his life in the line of duty." - Aamir Khan.

Contd. On Page 31



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Contd. From Page 21

In Parliament, while participating in a debate on the November 26 terrorist strike, Rahul Gandhi told the Lok Sabha, *"The terrorist attack on Mumbai is an attack on the whole nation. It is an attack on the idea of India. It is an attack on all of us, it is an attack on the freedom of our people. ... it is a new kind of warfare against India. Terrorists view and attack us as their enemies. We must also respond as one."*

Mumbaikers love to talk about resilience and spirit. After this, more than a handful of commentators have said, enough! We're tired of bouncing back, sick of being strong. And yet, less than a week after the attacks, wedding season was in full force again. The streets are now mobbed with taxis and Hondas filled with women wearing elaborate saris, bangles and glinting jewels. You can follow the spirit of this city on a string of marigolds.

RE-BUILDING AFTER THE SIEGE

Chabad-Lubavitch leaders worked overtime to transform the Mumbai attacks into an unparalleled opportunity for spreading the movement's message. Chabad has received unprecedented media exposure since terrorists struck its center in Mumbai, killing two of its emissaries to the Indian city - Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife, Rivkah, along with four other Jews.

Within a week of the attacks, Chabad had raised about \$1 million through mailboxes it had opened on Chabad.org, one for helping to raise Moshe, the Holtzbergs' 2-year-old son who escaped the attack on the Chabad house, and one to help rebuild the Chabad house in Mumbai, which was damaged badly by explosions and gunfire during the terrorists' siege and attempted rescue by Indian Special Forces. This approach can just as well be understood as a natural reaction for a movement that prides itself on its success in helping to rebuild Jewish life around the globe after the Holocaust.

The re-opening of the Taj Mahal Hotel

The 105-year-old Taj Mahal hotel, one of two luxury hotels hit by Islamist militants in the Mumbai attacks, was set to reopen its doors on December 21, 2008.

"To reopen the Taj with such speed but with no loss of attention to detail shows our resolve to commemorate all the innocent and brave people who lost their lives during the terrorist attacks," said Raymond Bickson, managing director and chief executive of The Indian Hotels Company, part of Tata.

However, only the new wing of the hotel, known as The Taj Mahal Tower, was slated to open in December, and the company has not said when the older part of sprawling Mumbai landmark would reopen.

Ratan Tata, chairman of Tata Group which also owns several Heritage properties in India, has vowed to *"rebuild every inch"* and *"bring back the Taj to its full glory."*

Mumbai's luxury Trident hotel which was also attacked by the Islamist gunmen, was also scheduled to re-open on December 21, according to its owners, which have said it would be as *"impeccable"* as it was before.

