

Victims speak of night of terror in Mumbai

AP, Mumbai

Western visitors and Mumbai residents ducked under tables at luxury five-star hotels as staff members locked restaurant doors at the first rattle of gunfire and explosions in the lobby below.

Not far away, army commandoes in battle-ready camouflage uniforms battled attackers in black shirts and jeans carrying shoulder bags filled with ammunition at Mumbai's main railway station, which was filled with commuters waiting to catch trains home.

Twelve hours after the first shots were fired at about 10 p.m. at a busy Mumbai cafe, the terror attacks continued

Thursday inside two of the city's best-known and most opulent hotels where terrorists still held hostages.

"We were at dinner when we heard shots fired. There was gunfire and explosions. We stayed on the floor, many were lying under tables, under furniture, and the hotel staff told us to be quiet," said Cheryl Robinson, a British tourist who was trapped inside Mumbai's Taj Mahal hotel with two friends. "The hotel staff were stupendous. They locked the doors and warned us to sit tight."

She said restaurants and rooms were flooded with water after a pipe burst in the chaos of the gunshots and blasts. "We lay down in the water. We could hear the

sound of people running outside. It was terrifying."

Seven long hours later, a barefoot Robinson shivered as she stood outside the burning but still majestic stone-columned hotel that belched out black smoke from shattered windows. Soldiers and firefighters helped her and several others to climb down ladders and escape the blazing edifice as the firing continued inside.

A clutch of weeping tourists from Spain, Italy and Britain, also barefoot, huddled together holding bottles of water and haversacks. They waved away journalists eager for news.

'We want US and British', say Mumbai gunmen

AP, Mumbai

The young gunmen roaming the corridors of two luxury hotels in Mumbai were shooting wildly, but they knew exactly what sort of guests they intended to take hostage.

"They told everybody to stop and put their hands up and asked if there were any British or Americans," Alex Chamberlain, a British guest at the Oberoi/Trident hotel, said after fleeing his captors via a fire escape.

"My friend said to me, 'don't be a hero, don't say you

are British.'

Gunmen held an unknown number of hostages inside the hotel and at the famous Taj Mahal hotel overnight and through much of Thursday.

Chamberlain told Indian television that he and other guests had been herded together by the gunmen and taken up to the upper floors of the hotel.

Rakesh Patel, a guest at the Taj, said that "they were after foreigners, because they were asking for British or American passports."

"They came from the restaurant and took us up the stairs," Patel, a British citizen based in Hong Kong, told NDTV news, his face blackened by smoke.

"They were very young, like boys really, wearing jeans and T-shirts," he said, adding that he and another hostage managed to escape on the 18th floor.

One Taj guest related how she lay on the floor of one room with 25 other petrified people as gunmen fought special commandos.



An Indian National security guard runs for cover opposite the Taj Mahal hotel in Mumbai yesterday. More than 100 people were killed and around 100 more wounded in coordinated attacks by gunmen in India's commercial capital Mumbai.

World recoils in horror

AFP, London

World leaders expressed anger and horror Thursday after Islamist militant attacks in Mumbai left more than 100 people dead, as fears grew over foreign hostages.

While Indian army commandoes battled gunmen who launched the attacks on luxury hotels and other targets in India's financial hub, European governments were reportedly making plans to evacuate their nationals.

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown sent Indian Premier Manmohan Singh a message assuring that "the UK stands solidly with his government as they respond, and to offer all necessary help."

"These outrageous attacks in Mumbai will be met with a vigorous response," he said.

The US State Department called the attacks "horrific" and US president-elect Barack Obama said they showed the need for the United States to work with other nations to "root out and destroy terrorist networks."

"These coordinated attacks on innocent civilians demonstrate the grave and urgent threat of terrorism," said Obama's chief national security spokesman Brooke Anderson.

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari, whose country has seen an upsurge of Islamist attacks, "stressed the need for taking strict measures to eradicate terrorism and extremism from the region".

Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai said: "Terrorists are especially challenging South Asia. A vigorous response to counter these terrorist challenges requires an even more intensified regional cooperation and coordination in all aspects."

Nato Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer blasted the "despicable" raids.

"I condemn in the strongest possible terms the mindless and indiscriminate terrorist attacks in Mumbai. Attacking innocent people, tourists, and patients in hospitals is despicable and cowardly," he said in a statement.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said the violence was "totally unacceptable". The European Union expressed "horror and indignation" after European parliament members were caught up in the carnage.

Fears the attacks could scare off foreign visitors were heightened when the England cricket team abandoned its one-day series in India, leaving a subsequent Test series also in doubt.

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Army personnel take position during operations at Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai yesterday, one of the sites of attacks by alleged militant gunmen.

Naval warships and aircrafts scouring seas for 'mother ship'

PTI, Mumbai

Indian Navy and Coast Guards yesterday pressed into service warships and surveillance aircraft to scour the high seas in and around Mumbai to look for 'Mother Ship' which could have ferried the terrorists who carried out attacks in this metropolis.

The Naval and Coast Guards ships have since this morning intercepted and checked antecedents of all the vessels operating or moored around the metropolis. Vice Admiral J S Bedi Flag Officer Commanding in Chief

Western Naval Command said in Mumbai.

The surveillance of large areas of the Arabian Sea is still on, Bedi said as he disclosed that two Naval War Ships along with vessels from the Coast Guard, Helicopter and Droniers Maritime reconnaissance Aircraft were involved in the massive sea hunt.

These comments come in the wake of eye-witnesses saying they had seen young men in their early twenties carrying heavy rucksacks disgorge from high speed boats off the Gateway of India.



PHOTO: AFP
Indian and foreign guests rush out of the Taj Mahal hotel, the site of one of the shootouts with terrorists, during a gunfire in Mumbai on Wednesday night.

Commandoes surround Jewish headquarters

AP, Mumbai

Police commandoes surrounded the headquarters Thursday of the ultra-orthodox Jewish outreach group Chabad Lubavitch, which gunmen had seized overnight during a series of coordinated attacks across this seaside city.

Thousands of gawkers stood in the narrow alleyways near the white, five-story building, where heavy curtains hung behind windows broken by gunfire. Neighbours had tried to protect the house as armed gunmen seized it Wednesday night.

Who could be behind the Mumbai attacks?

THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE

Militants armed with automatic weapons and grenades attacked luxury hotels, hospitals and a famous tourist cafe in India's commercial capital Mumbai late yesterday, killing more than 100 people.

India PM points to external links

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said the attacks were probably plotted by a group based in a neighbouring country.

Indian governments often blame neighbouring Pakistan or sometimes Bangladesh for supporting or harbouring militant groups which have launched attacks on Indian soil.

Singh said that he would "take up strongly" the use of neighbours' territory to launch attacks on India.

Who is behind the attacks?

Witnesses say the attackers were young South Asian men speaking Hindi or Urdu, suggesting they are probably members of an Indian militant group rather than foreigners.

The attacks were claimed by a previously unknown group calling itself the Deccan Mujahideen in an e-mail to news organisations. Deccan is an area of southern India.

Analysts say that while it is not clear whether the claim is genuine, the attacks were most likely carried out by a group called the Indian Mujahideen. The name used in the claim of responsibility suggests the attackers could be members of a south Indian offshoot or cell of the Indian Mujahideen.

Who are the Indian Mujahideen?

Indian police say the Indian Mujahideen is an offshoot of the banned Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), but that local Muslims appear to have been given training and backing from militant groups in neighbouring Pakistan and Bangladesh.

SIMI has been blamed by police for almost



PHOTO: AFP
Indian policemen prepare to take position at the site of attack in the Colaba area of Mumbai yesterday.

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