

# “Between the Two Fires” – “Life Goes on – 24X7”

**Uttam C. Jain**

Architect

Night had fallen; peace and calm prevailed. Marine Drive looked magical. Smitten by its charm, unmindful, I was lost in the distant horizon from the balcony of my apartment facing the southern tip of Mumbai.

Hypnotized by the beauty of the seascape and the famous Art-Deco precinct popularly known as the Queen’s Necklace, the Marine Drive promenade, with its iconic presence in the city was overwhelming. The view of Nariman Point beyond, with the starry lights of the Colaba settlements in the background looked so surreal that it was hard to believe that it was part of Mumbai’s otherwise harsh realities. It was mesmerizing. The music of the all-pervading silence playing on one’s mind was captivating.

Suddenly I got a jolt; out of my dream. I feared Mumbai would never be the same again.

What was happening?

It was turning hellish. 26/11 was creating the gloomiest history for Mumbaikars and their city.

From about 9.30 p.m. onwards, unexpected gun shots and bomb explosions were heard loud, at times followed by flares from the firing and fire in the distance that kept the sky lit up. The night’s silence was menacingly pierced. Sadly, more was to follow.

Inquisitive, I turned on the Television “BREAKING NEWS!” The terrorists had invaded Mumbai. The accompanying visuals of the terrorists gunning, firing, bomb

blasting indiscriminately, and massacring innocent citizens of our beloved city were horrifying.

The charming city of Mumbai was inhumanely being raped by the perpetrators. It was sinfully devastating. The attack affected:

- The Taj Mahal Hotel with its iconic presence as a heritage structure and with a brilliant past,
- The celebrated Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (formerly known as Victoria Terminus),
- The Trident Hotel at Nariman Point a modern piece of architecture,
- The new Oberoi Hotel adjacent to the Trident
- The Cama Hospital,
- The Leopold café and
- The Nariman House in Colaba

In fact, the entire city was traumatized by the predators that are believed to have come from the sea. Several hundred men, women and children of all hues and every strata of the society were butchered mercilessly between 26th and 29th November 2008. They all were part of Mumbai’s human face. This unpardonable satanic act inflicted deep wounds on the psyche of every Mumbaikar.

Why and how did it happen?

In my wisdom, without the slightest doubt, it was a collective failure on the part of a system that ought to have shielded and saved lives. The Government, the Navy, the coast guard, the disconnect of the intelligence mechanisms; especially the inapt mandarins in the administration and the citizenry all are culpable for a

mishap of such magnitude. Anything being done was too little, too late.

But, MUMBAI WAS NOT TO BE THAT!

In a short span of time of less than 30 days the metropolis of Mumbai sprang back to life, more rigorously and much more determined. Men and women, old and young, affluent and impoverished all together with their undying spirit started adding more spice in the life of this fabulous city. The city that was so vandalized and painfully devastated returned to its old charm attempting to erase all memories of the loss and destructions so recently. Mumbai began to move forward on the fast track sooner than later. So it was to be! With every one contributing it turned into a miracle.

The tell-tale visuals in the form of a photographic essay that records a Mumbaikar’s life between the two fires; one represented by the fires at Trident, Taj, VT, Cama Hospital the Leopold café Mumbai and the other on the sands of Girgaum Chowpaty. The former taking innocent lives and the latter giving life and warmth to the dwellers at Chowpatty. While photographing the fishermen’s family, a few family members, the ladies in particular, unexpectedly turned hostile. Suspecting my intentions they thought I was a Government agent creating dubious records of their living and encroaching on the beach to be eventually de-housed and shooed away. With some persuasion and by explaining my intentions, the men when convinced opened up. They narrated about their helplessness and disconnect with the fabric of city of Mumbai, their predicaments about the pathetic conditions they live in with the children and the elders, specifically

lack of the basic facilities for bathing, washing, cleaning, sanitation, and privacy for the women and what have you. All is appalling to witness. They had lost their faith in the city fathers and the Government's apathy was all humiliating. It is shocking to note that the India's financial capital has such deprivation.

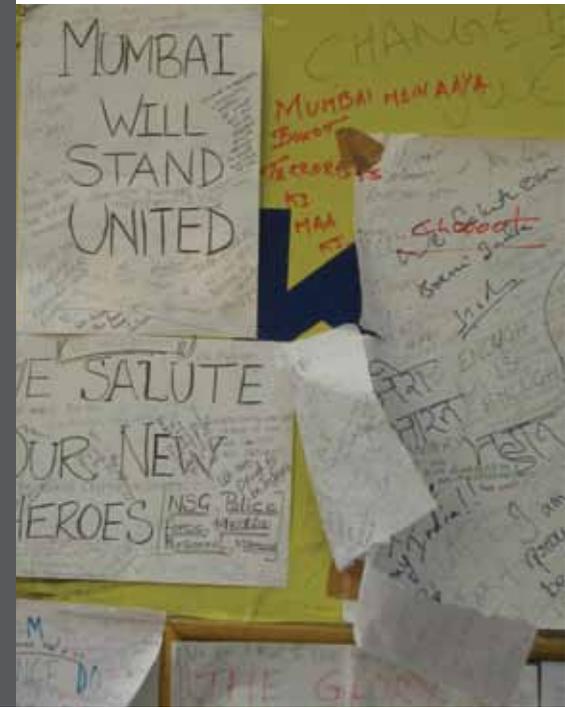
Disengaged, oblivious to the indulgence of the upper socio-economic status of the people enjoying their evening out, devouring golgappas and licking fingers covered with chaat-masala at the food stalls on the south end of Girgam Chowpati, the fisherman's family felt completely marginalized and lost. Their complaint was about hardship the family faced in Mumbai - for they

had no place of their own elsewhere in the city. Darting at me the fisherman questioned, "Sir, would your publishing our photographs improve our life?" I was stunned. There was no answer to that.

At the end I do note that Mumbai has many layers of life. Each has a different meaning for different strata of the society depending on the social banking. The values for every individual get prioritized and modified according to each one's perception.

All this calls for serious contemplation. We need to reorient ourselves to make Mumbai a very livable, humane city. It is imperative, now, for the future of the next generation.













# New look, new name

**AFTER 21 MONTHS** Taj Mahal Palace will include two suites and will be launched in Sept-end

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**MUMBAI:** Twenty-one months after 26/11, the heritage palace wing of the Taj Mahal hotel will reopen to guests again in a couple of days with a new name, The Taj Mahal Palace.

On August 18, the country's first luxury hotel will reopen with 285 rooms, 19 themed suites, said Raymond Hickson, managing director of the Indian Hotels Company Ltd, at a press conference on Thursday that the new name would apply collectively to both the Palace and Tower wings of the hotel.

"Two years ago, our world was torn apart. Yet our staff, the hotel and this city stood strong and brave," said Hickson, who stated that the re-christening was a means of commemorating the efforts of the Taj to rise beyond the tragedy. Tata Group chairman Ratan Tata arrived last night at the press conference to address members of the staff, who assembled along the banisters of the grand staircase beneath the dome to take an oath of courage and to shower rose petals on him.

"This is a very special occasion for this company as this memorable old lady is going to reopen the splendour it has upheld for a century," said Tata.

The newly restored Taj will include two suites that will be launched at the end of September — the Raji Shankar suite where George Harrison had taken sitar lessons from the Indian maestro, and the 5,000 sq ft Tata suite.

The hotel will also now offer private butler services to all guests in the Palace wing.

Anil Goel, executive director of finance for the group, said that the Taj spent a total of Rs 175 crore for restoration work. They have filed an insurance claim of Rs 180 crore towards loss of property covering a period of 12 months since the attack, and have absorbed the losses faced in the seven additional months they have taken to restore.

"We are flooded with inquiries for bookings from all old guests and customers, including many who were present in the hotel during the attack," said Ajay Misra, senior vice president, sales and marketing.

**LUXURY REVIVED:** The executive suite of the wing has been refurbished. The hotel will now offer private butler services to all guests in the Palace wing.

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**TIME FOR CELEBRATION:** Hotel staff shower rose petals on officials of the Tata Group, including Chairman Ratan Tata, as they announce the reopening of the heritage wing of the Taj Mahal Palace.



**ALIVE AGAIN:** (Left) The passage of the heritage wing of the Taj after the revamp. (Above) The passage was ravaged during the November 26, 2008, terror attacks.



**NEW BEGINNINGS:** Hotel staff line up along the staircase to listen to Chairman Ratan Tata's address at the renovated wing.

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**INTERVIEW**  
H.N. SRINIVAS  
**Fund for victims hit by disaster**

H.N. Srinivas, senior vice president, human resources and in-charge of the Tata Trust Fund

How does the Tata Trust Fund help survivors and families of the victims of the attacks?

We were first interested in giving a one-time sum to the families, but in their rehabilitation. A team of counsellors, psychiatrists and social workers from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences spent several months tracking the families of all victims and assessing their individual needs. We identified 150 families to whom we will pay a monthly sum ranging from Rs 2,000-30,000. We are also supporting education of 60 children who were in trauma after the attack.

How much has the Trust spent on rehabilitation?

Initially, we collected Rs 5 crore from Tata companies, other donors and the Taj itself. This sum has grown since then.

Will the Trust continue once families are rehabilitated?

The fund has been set up for those affected by disasters. We have used it for Bharat foods and now for the relief work in Leh.