

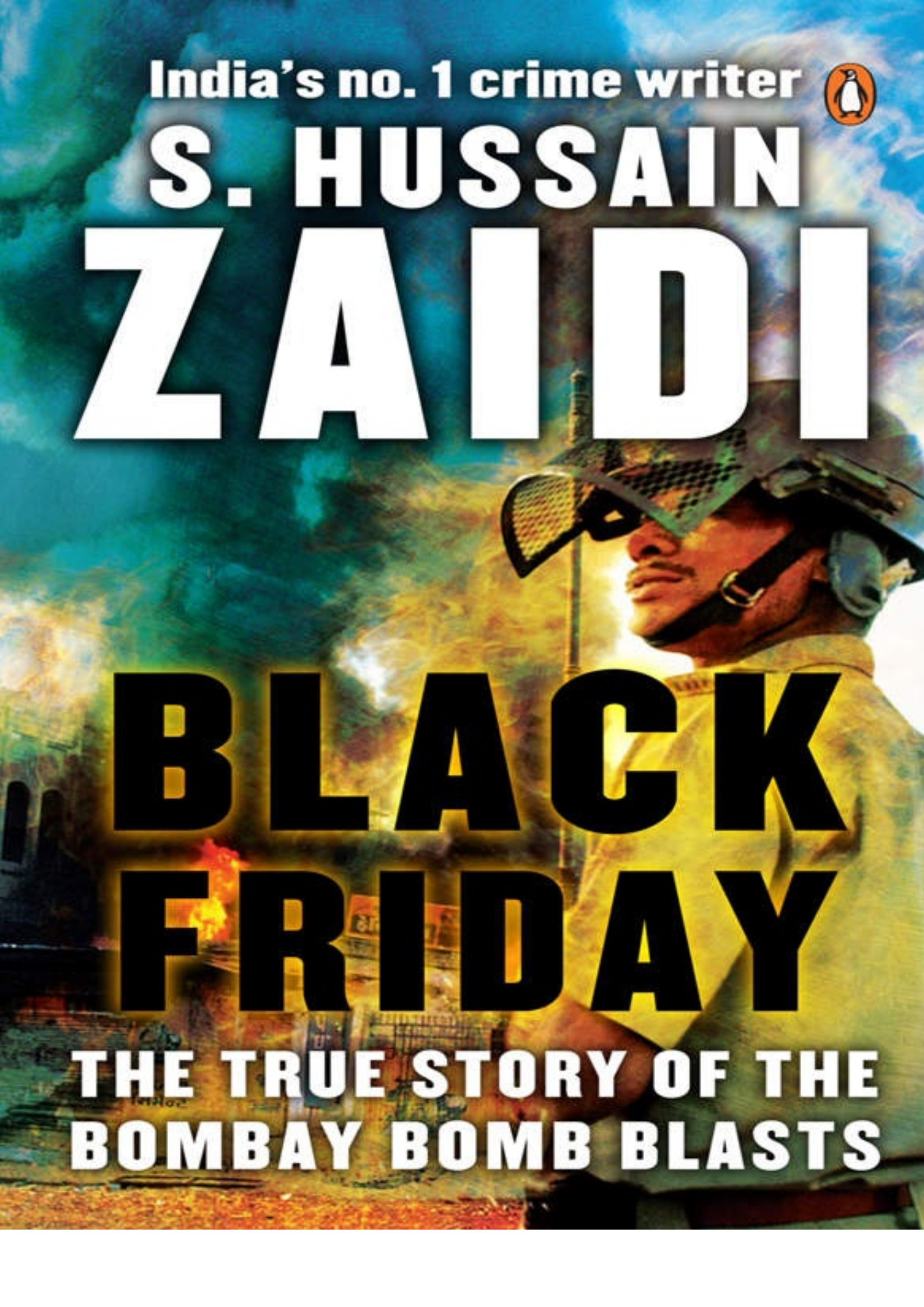
India's no. 1 crime writer

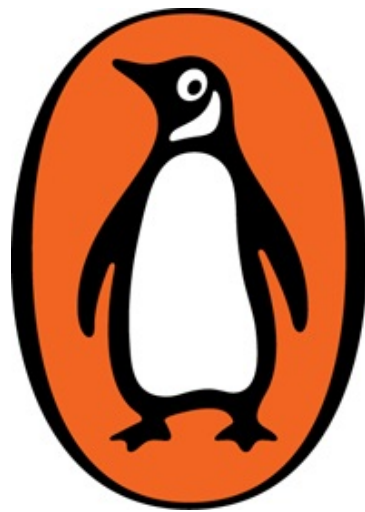


S. HUSSAIN ZAIDI

BLACK FRIDAY

THE TRUE STORY OF THE
BOMBAY BOMB BLASTS





black friday



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S. Hussain Zaidi is a Mumbai-based journalist, a veteran of investigative, crime and terror reporting. He has worked for the *Asian Age*, *Mumbai Mirror*, *Mid-Day* and *Indian Express*. His previous books include bestsellers such as *Black Friday*, *Mafia Queens of Mumbai*, *Dongri to Dubai* and *Byculla Bangkok*. *Black Friday* and *Dongri to Dubai* have been adapted into the Bollywood films *Black Friday* and *Shootout at Wadala* respectively. He lives with his family in Mumbai.

Praise for the book

‘[Zaidi’s] writerly voice [is] that of a newspaperman: grim, controlled, often more notable for substance than style. His writing . . . displays an acute eye for emotional detail’—*Mint*

‘Gripping’—*Deccan Herald*

‘[A] taut account . . . Zaidi provides the complete picture: of the investigators who pursued the terrorists and of the people of Bombay, who handled the tragedy with rare resilience’—*Business Standard*

‘The crime reporter has built up a reputation for scoops and access to elusive criminals’—*Time Out*

‘[*Black Friday* puts] the entire cataclysm into perspective. Page after page of revisited horror reveals new facets of corruption, new angles to the politician–Mafia nexus’—*First City*

Also by the same author

Mafia Queens of Mumbai: Stories of Women from the Ganglands (with Jane Borges)

Dongri to Dubai: Six Decades of the Mumbai Mafia

Headley and I

Byculla to Bangkok

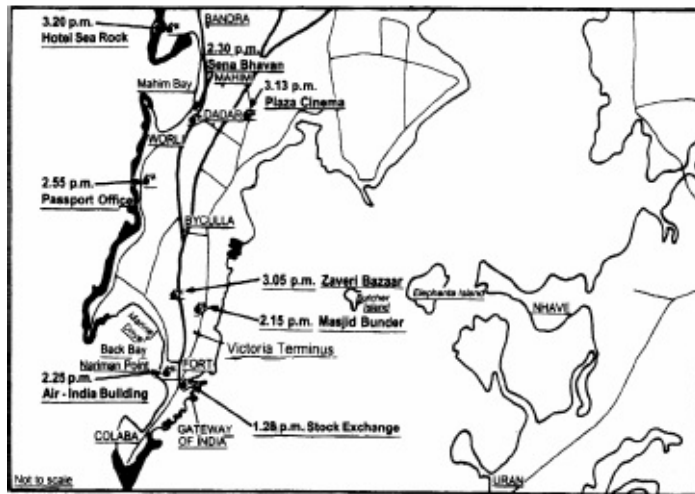
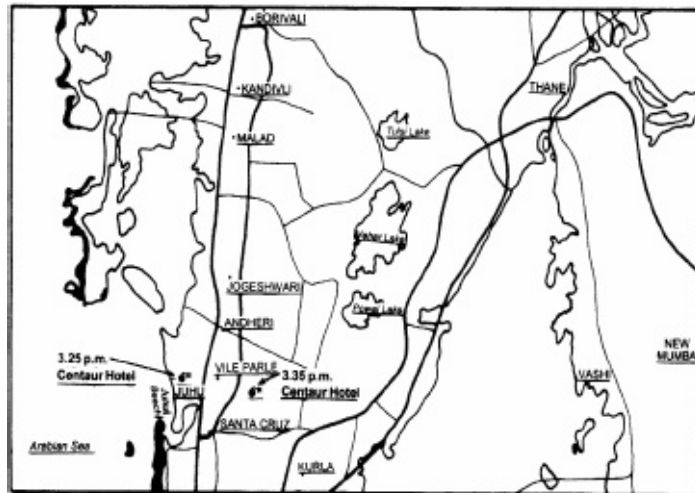
My Name Is Abu Salem

For my parents,

Ashfaq Hussain and Khatoon Jahan

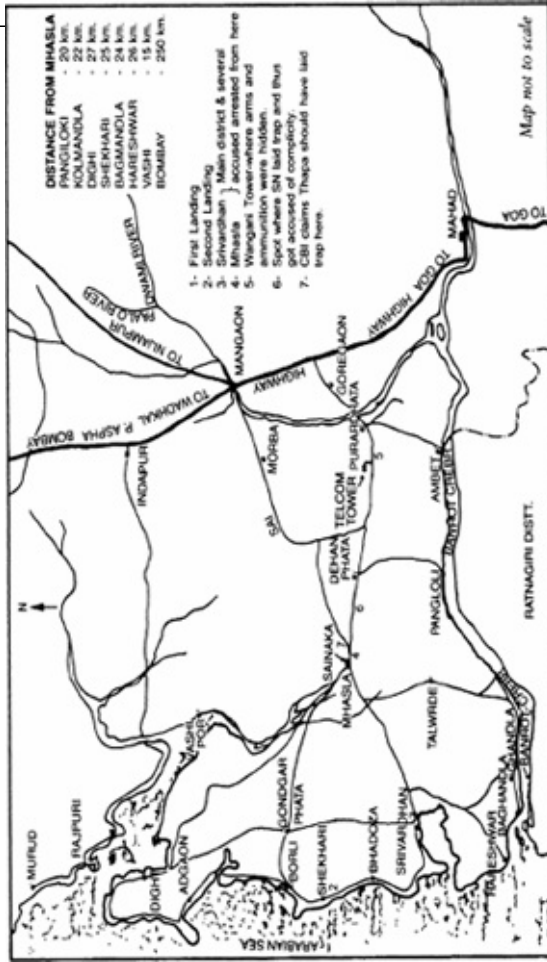
Also for the little angels who brought so much joy into my life, Kumail, Fatema, Narjis and Ammar

City Map with Bomb Sites



Maps not to scale

Landing Sites



Prologue

That the day could hold anything unusual was far from the minds of Bombay's thirteen million people when the city woke up to the start of another sweltering day on 12 March 1993. The monsoons were still three months away, but the temperature was already 32°C and the relative humidity seventy-two per cent. As office-goers rushed to work in the city's overcrowded trains, the heat was the favourite topic of conversation. Some discussed the national judo championship beginning that day for which nearly five hundred judokas had gathered.

A large percentage of the office-goers were headed for the Fort area in southern Bombay, the commercial heart of not only the city, but of the country as well. This small area, named after the British fort that once stood there, grew into the commercial hub early in the eighteenth century. Today it houses the headquarters of several banks, including the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), and large corporate houses besides the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), the oldest stock exchange in Asia and the largest in the country. Business worth hundreds of crores was transacted at the BSE every day.

Despite the heat, it was work as usual on Dalal Street, often called Bombay's Wall Street. The frangipani drooped visibly in the nearby St Thomas's Cathedral, but the prospect of the weekend had not yet cast its ennui over the milling crowds within the stock exchange. This Friday the trading room on the BSE's first floor was packed with about 4,000 people. Friday was the day of *badla* trading when residual shares are disposed of before the stock exchange shuts operations for the weekend.

At lunchtime Dalal Street, and the surrounding area, transforms itself into a food paradise guaranteed to satisfy all stomachs and wallets. The choices range from mounds of yellow rice, dosas turning a crisp brown in the large griddle, *chaat*, heaps of noodles with white sauce, piping hot toasted sandwiches and *paav-bhaji*. At the junction of every footpath, jostling for space with pedestrians and sandwich-makers, are peanut vendors and *fruitwala bhaiyyas* with gravity-defying pyramids of fruit seldom seen in the regular market.

Trading closed at 1.30 p.m. There was a bell at 1 p.m., which signalled the last half-hour of trading and was often the cue for people not involved in trading to leave the building for lunch. A second bell would be sounded half an hour later to signal the end of trading. By this time, most of the people would have left the trading hall.

On that Friday, what was heard at 1.28 p.m. was not the shrill ring of the BSE bell but a muffled boom.

To the people milling around outside, eating lunch, the scene before them transformed suddenly from the familiar to the unimaginable. Smoke drifted out from the BSE's basement; blood-splattered survivors trickled out of the building. The Bank of Baroda branch on the ground floor was blown apart. Around them, a few of their fellow-eaters and food vendors on the roadside were also killed from the impact of the bomb.

The force of the explosion carried right up to the tenth floor, where the windowpanes shattered. Mild tremors were felt up to a radius of 300 metres, and the sound carried over the busy hum of traffic to the Victoria Terminus (VT) a kilometre away. The cheek-by-jowl buildings in the densely populated area around the BSE, some of them dating back to the early half of the century, were shaken

by the explosion.

Inside the BSE, the scene was chaotic. Most of the people in the basement and mezzanine had been killed. The roof of the underground car park had caved in, flattening vehicles and trapping men. The state-of-the-art EPABX system, costing Rs 1.5 crore and the lifeline of the stock exchange, had broken like a toy.

The first thought of those who survived was to get to safety. The lifts were still running and stairways were intact. The result was a stampede—several men and women were injured and crushed to death in the panic. Some people on the seventh floor used the drainage pipes to slide down.

Outside the BSE, the street was covered in a macabre mosaic of blood, limbs, glass and shattered application forms. The mounds of food, so attractive just minutes ago, were now splattered with the remains of people's bodies.

Twenty-six-year-old Babu Murty had heard that Bombay was the city of gold and that if he worked hard, one day he could have his own clothing store. He ran a sandwich and samosa stall outside the BSE on weekdays. On weekends, when Dalal Street was deserted, he hawked T-shirts near the Gateway of India. But despite his spirit and grit, he didn't stand a chance. He was killed almost instantly as flying shards of glass and debris pierced his body. He was rushed to the state-run Jamsheer Jeejeebhoy (JJ) Hospital in Byculla but it was too late.

Four brothers of a migrant family from northern India ran a sugarcane juice stall near the BSE. The fifth brother returned shortly after the blast to find his siblings lying in a pool of blood. They did not live the short distance to the Gokuldas Tejpal (GT) Hospital, run by the city corporation.

Fifty-one-year-old Gokulchand Gupta had run a *panipuri* stall, one of the oldest in the area, for thirteen years. He and his family had moved to Bombay from Uttar Pradesh (UP) twenty-five years ago. Gupta's head was blown off. His only son, seventeen-year-old Premchand, was charred beyond recognition. Five of the hired assistants at the stall were also killed. The only one from Gupta's stall to survive was a boy called Shamsheer.

Raju, an *upma* vendor from Mandya in Karnataka; Ashok Singh and Kamla Singh from UP who had a *lassi* stall; Guddu Paav-bhaji Wala, who was a big hit with stockbrokers: all migrants who had come to Bombay with hopes and dreams died in the blast.

Rita Dennis, who worked at the Graphica Printers Office close to the BSE, had decided to go down and buy the afternoon papers herself instead of sending the peon as she usually did. She didn't live to read it. She left behind two young children: Meldon, eleven, and Renita, six. It would take her husband, Matthew, years to come to terms with her death.

Ashok Dashrath Ghadge, a *vada-paav* vendor outside the BSE, was serving a customer when he felt the ground shake beneath him. That was the last thing he registered; when he came to he found himself at GT Hospital, thankful to God that he had been spared.

Twenty-two-year-old Mukesh Khatri had gone to deposit a cheque at the Bank of Baroda branch near the BSE. The queue extended outside the bank, and he was waiting there when he heard a boom that threw him on the road. 'There were pieces of glass flying all around, many were embedded in my body, and my face,' he recounted. People stamped all over him in their frenzy to run out. He finally got up, soaked in his own blood, and walked all the way to GT Hospital, more than a kilometre away. The hospital was full so they sent him to JJ Hospital. At least he lived to tell the tale.

This blast caused the death of eighty-four people; as many as 217 were injured, some severely.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Chandrashekhar Rokade, in charge of Zone I, which came under what the police called the south region of the city, covering the area from Cuffe Parade and Colaba to Malabar Hill, Peddar Road, Dongri and Nagpada, and included the BSE, was in the Bombay High Court. He was attending the legal proceedings relating to a controversial Shiv Sena leader from Thane, Anand Dighe. When Rokade heard the distant rumble, he thought that it was caused by Shiv Sainiks assembled in strength at the court premises. But then his walkie-talkie crackled into life. 'There's been a blast in the share market.'

Police Commissioner (CP) Amarjeet Singh Samra had just begun his lunch in his anteroom at the Bombay Police Commissionerate building in the police headquarters complex near Crawford Market, the lively and centrally located vegetable and fruit market. The twenty-third police chief of Bombay since Independence, Samra had held this post for about six weeks. He was known for his flamboyance, accessibility and the sheer competence with which he did his job, and had worked with police departments and law enforcement agencies across the world.

His personal assistant, M.Y. Ramani, and liaison officer, Sub-inspector (SI) Shirish Sawant, barged in as he was eating. Sawant said, 'Sir, control has informed us that there was a blast in the share market.' Samra strode over to his desk and called his joint commissioner of police (JCP) (crime), the second in the police hierarchy, Mahesh Narayan Singh.

Singh's office was in another of the three buildings in the police headquarters complex. The storeroom building of the crime branch offices were known as Patherwali.

Singh too had just heard of the blast and was about to leave for the spot. Samra instructed him to keep him posted.

Though the police headquarters were within walking distance of the BSE, it took Singh twenty-five minutes to get there by car. By this time it was almost 2 p.m. Crowds had gathered in a manner that only immense calamity can summon. Singh entered the basement car park, and it required all the strength gathered from three decades of police experience not to be overcome by the scene of devastation that greeted him.

He would carry the memory of that scene to his last day: mangled cars with shattered windscreens, splotches of blood in macabre patterns on the walls and the reverberating moans of the injured. Blue-uniformed fire brigade personnel and green-clad bomb squad members were moving about with amazing agility looking for survivors.

The police at the scene had until then concentrated on keeping curious onlookers at bay. Under Singh's supervision, they started organizing rescue teams, and made arrangements to transport survivors to hospitals. A Bombay Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) bus soon wormed its way into the narrow lane.

The city's chief fire officer, Durgadas Kulkarni, had reached the spot too, and he began to coordinate his men's work. The public joined in the rescue work. The injured and the dead were transported to the three nearby hospitals, GT Hospital, the corporation-run St George Hospital and St. Xavier's Hospital.

The hospitals, however, lacked disaster management strategies, and found it enormously difficult to cope with the sudden influx of so many grievously injured patients. The dead were dumped on the

floor of the casualty ward, while those alive were propped up against the walls next to them. Faced with such an immense task, the staff had no idea where to begin.

At 2.15 p.m., a bomb went off in the middle of Bombay's largest wholesale market for grain and spice, at Narsi Natha Street in Katha Bazaar, near Masjid Bunder. This is perhaps the most congested area in the city, where trucks, handcarts and pedestrians jostle for space in the narrow streets. Two cabs, parked side by side, suddenly went up in a ball of fire.

A teenager and his father were passing by when they got caught in the explosion. The father died on the spot. The boy's lungs were shattered. A telephone booth nearby caught fire, but this was extinguished quickly.

Five people were killed in this blast, and sixteen injured. Several vehicles were damaged, as were shops and offices in the vicinity.

Rokade, whose jurisdiction also included Katha Bazaar, was still in the High Court when he heard about the second blast. He longed to be out on the streets, dealing with the situation, but he knew the matter at hand had to be resolved first.

Rokade left the courtroom for a moment and was pacing down the corridors, mulling over the two explosions, when he felt the ground under him tremble. A loud noise rent the air. An orderly rushed out of the courtroom with a message from the presiding judge that Rokade should return instantly. The proceedings were suspended. Rokade escorted the van carrying Dighe to Carnac Bunder Road, and then asked his driver to head towards the BSE.

At 2.25 p.m., a car bomb had exploded in the portico of the high-rise Air-India building, about one kilometre from the High Court. The Air-India building is near Nariman Point, south Bombay's most elite business district where major international companies, foreign banks and consulates are located. The Bank of Oman branch on the ground floor of the building, outside which the blast had occurred, was gutted. Experts were to later conclude that this was a more powerful blast than the earlier one, the noise carrying to Ballard Pier, 2.5 kilometres away. Twenty people were killed in this blast, and eighty-seven injured. The toll was rising at frightening speed.

News of the third blast caused panic, and wild rumours began to circulate. There had been an invasion from across the seas, some insisted. Others claimed, with equal conviction, that the top brass of the Shiv Sena was being killed. Overburdened telephone lines jammed, heightening the chaos. Office workers spilled on to the streets, heading for Churchgate and VT, the city's two main railway hubs. Policemen were not immune to panic themselves. The city was on the run from itself.

Back in the Commissionerate, Samra called up Additional Commissioner of Police (Addl. CP) P.K.B. Chakraborty, and dispatched him to the Air-India building. At the BSE, Singh had by then heard of the latest blast, which he thought was the second one, as he had not heard of the Katha Bazaar explosion. He got into his car and hurried towards the site, followed by Kulkarni, the fire chief, and the bomb squad.

At 2.30 p.m., a blast shook Lucky Petrol Pump adjacent to Sena Bhavan at Dadar in the centre of the city. The Bhavan is the headquarters of the Shiv Sena, the party widely held responsible for the communal riots of the previous months. This was the only blast site where fire quickly followed the explosion, and the Mohammed Ali building next to the petrol pump was virtually brought down.

major chunk of a wall fell off onto the road.

John Thomas, an employee of New Mika Laminates near Worli, was killed. He had called his wife Sophaiya when he heard about the blast at the BSE, before he left his Worli office to deliver a cheque at Indian Oil Corporation at Sewri, to reassure her. After making the delivery, he had gone to the petrol pump to refuel his Hero Honda motorcycle before he returned to the office. He had just crossed the petrol pump to the other side, near Sena Bhavan, an attendant said. Thomas could be identified only by the crucifix on his gold chain and his wedding ring.

The terrorist designs seemed to have failed, as Sena Bhavan was unharmed, as were Sena members. However, four people died and fifty were injured in the explosion. This blast also seemed to indicate the communal designs of the bombers. As irate Shiv Sainiks spilled on the streets, the situation looked perilously close to spinning out of control.

At 2.55 p.m., a bomb seemed to go off in a crowded double-decker BEST bus outside the regional passport office (RPO) at Worli. It was so powerful that that the five-ton bus was lifted into the air, and the upper deck blown into the hutment colony of Nehru Nagar. Residents panicked as pieces of metal and bodies rained down on them. There were no survivors on board; not even the bodies could be identified. The body of the driver was hurtled across the road into the colony. Vehicles around the bus too caught fire, and four buildings—Rupala Sadan, Ramodaya Mansion, Malkani Mahal and Manjrekar Sadan—along the road, which housed shops and an Udipi restaurant, were badly damaged. Many buildings in the area had their windowpanes shattered, including the RPO, the Brown Bowe building and Century Bhavan. On the road, a deep crater marked the spot where the bomb had exploded.

The sights were gruesome. A *paanwala*'s head was severed from his torso and deposited on the counter in front of him. The body of Neogi, manager of the Bata shop, was found sandwiched between two walls that collapsed on each other. Flying shrapnel was lodged in the stomach of Darin Khavarian, who had come from Iran to see his brother Minocher, owner of the Asian Stores and Restaurant. Sudesh Bhandari of the Blue Star Laundry died when shrapnel pierced his heart. Kari Ramodaya and his brother Rajabhai, the owners of Ramodaya Mansion, who were standing outside the Taj Cake Shop, were also killed.

Pradeep Manjrekar, the owner of Manjrekar Sadan, was using the telephone at the wine shop on the ground floor of his building when the blast occurred. 'First there was a cloud of dust, followed by thick white smoke, and then came the bang that shook the bottles in the wine shop. I saw limbs and objects flying all around, and vehicles on fire.' He said he saw at least five BEST buses and some fifteen cars burnt completely.

Raj Nath Ganjoo, the marketing manager of BASF, never stepped out of his office during working hours. But on that day, his watch had suddenly stopped working and he had been feeling uneasy about it. The bomb went off as he went out to get his watch repaired at a shop a few yards away. He was killed instantly.

Prachee Vartak and Sandhya Roy, trainee airhostesses at East West Airlines, were driving down the road in a company car. This had been Prachee's first day at work, and she was just returning from her first flight from Vishakapatnam. She was looking forward to going home to Worli and telling her parents about it. Hers had been a long battle to get the job, for her sister Aruna was already employed

with East West and their company policy did not permit employing family members. The blast destroyed the car. The driver Rajan was charred beyond recognition. Prachee was rushed to the King Edward Memorial (KEM) Hospital with thirty-five per cent burns, and died after three days. Sandhya sustained only minor injuries.

Darshan Lalan, in his first year at Lala Lajpat Rai College, had gone with four friends to see the p.m. show at Satyam Theatre. His friends had already crossed the road to enter the theatre when the bomb exploded. Darshan, who had stepped back to dodge a speeding taxi, was blown to bits. His friends were fine; only one suffered a minor leg injury.

This was eventually to be the deadliest of the blasts, killing 113 and injuring 227.

Back in the heart of the city the governor, P.C. Alexander, the titular head of the state administration was informed of the blasts. The telephone lines were down, so he had to send a message to Samra through the police control room. Samra could not respond immediately. It is not known where Chief Minister Sharad Pawar, who had assumed office barely a week previously, was.

When Samra heard of the blasts at Dadar and Worli, the first thought to cross his mind was the possibility of communal violence erupting again, a horrifying prospect after the events of the previous December and January. Determined to prevent it, he ordered the police control room to relay a message to the senior officer at every police station, that every policeman should come out on to the roads. Samra firmly believed that the sight of the men in uniform not only instilled confidence in the public, but also prevented hooliganism.

After this Samra tried to contact Alexander. The only mode of communication functioning was the police wireless. But, after struggling to instruct the governor for twenty-five minutes on how to operate the system, in full hearing of the entire police network, the commissioner gave up.

At about 3.15 p.m., while Kulkarni and Singh were at the Air-India building, they heard of the Serpentine Bhavan and Worli blasts. The fire officer left immediately for Worli. When his car came on to the main road, Kulkarni realized that the entire city had started driving home towards the suburbs, clogging the roads. He told his driver to take the wrong side of the road, meant for traffic heading into the city, and pushed ahead with his siren blaring and emergency lights flashing. He reached Worli in fifteen minutes, perhaps a record for inner-city travel.

Rokade was informed that there had been a blast in Zaveri Bazaar, the gold market, the day's sixth blast, and the fourth in his jurisdiction. A taxi had blown up at the junction of Shaikh Memon Street and Mirza Street, at the southern end of the gold market, at 3.05 p.m., shattering windows of buildings in the area and destroying nearby vehicles. The blast was low on intensity but high on volume, and was heard at the Lokmanya Tilak (LT) Marg police station, one kilometre away.

Niwas Garge, his wife and young son were walking through Dhanji Street at the northern end of Zaveri Bazaar when the explosion occurred. Garge heard the awful bang, and the next minute all three were thrown face down. A taxi nearby caught fire, and Garge could feel his face burning too. He rolled over and struggled to his feet, looking for his wife and son. His wife was burnt badly and he could not find his son. He put her in a taxi and sent her to the hospital, while he stayed behind to look for the boy. He never found him. His wife died in the hospital.

The toll in this blast was seventeen dead and fifty-seven injured. The gold shops at the end of Mir Street collapsed after the explosion.

As the wireless crackled with news of the blasts, Addl. CP Yadavrao Chinda Pawar, the deputy inspector general of police (DIG) of the central region, and his deputy, DCP (traffic) Rakesh Maria, who held additional charge of Zone IV, were at their common office above the Matunga police station. Bombay was divided into four regions and ten zones for police purposes. Each region was headed by an officer of the rank of DIG who was designated additional commissioner of police. The central region extended from Byculla, Worli, Dadar and Mahim to Vakola and Vile Parle.

Pawar and Maria rushed out. Since Sena Bhavan was a sensitive spot, and under his jurisdiction, Maria ordered the driver to take him there. He realized that people's mood could slowly turn from panic to anger, and the situation could explode anytime.

The crowds at Sena Bhavan had already started anti-Muslim sloganeering. Maria, taking advantage of his six feet two inches, walked up to the leader of the mob and looked down at him. 'No, it's got nothing to do with religious groups, this is part of a bigger conspiracy,' he said with great authority. He was not sure if this was true but it worked for the moment. The crowd slowly scattered. But even as it did, Maria heard on his wireless that communal riots had broken out at Mahim.

Pawar had taken the same route as Maria, but had been delayed in the traffic at Dadar Tram Terminus (TT). As his car neared the junction at the Plaza Cinema, Pawar heard a loud bang and saw people rushing away from the cinema. It was 3.13 p.m. As he got down from his car, Pawar could see that the Plaza, associated in the minds of the people with the state's legendary film star V. Shantaram, had been reduced to rubble. It was an important landmark: people crossing the Dadar bridge instinctively turned to look at the imposing façade.

Ten cinema-goers were killed and thirty-seven injured.

It took a little time for Pawar to grasp that an explosion had caused the devastation, but within minutes he was issuing orders and guiding the rescue work. Like every other Bombay policeman, he had too thought of the biggest nightmare of all: communal riots. As if on cue, his wireless came alive with news of Muslims being attacked at Mahim. Worse, there was also a report that some people had been driven up in a Maruti van and lobbed grenades at Machhimar Colony, the predominantly Hindu fishermen's colony in Mahim, and sped off. The grenade attack had left three dead. Another six who were injured were being attended to. The fisherfolk had now come out on the Mahim Causeway, baying for blood. Leaving his subordinates to deal with the fall out of the blast, Pawar rushed to Machhimar Colony.

As he pulled in there, he saw the situation was almost out of control. Angry fishermen had stalled the traffic on the causeway, and were in no mood to relent. Those who had done this must pay: it was simple. Pawar was faced with a dilemma. While he was a firm believer in the efficacy of lathi charges in certain situations, he was hesitant to use it on the fishermen who after all were the victims in the attack. Then the fishermen made up his mind for him as they went on the rampage. They besieged a bus belonging to Anjuman-i-Islam, a Muslim boys' school.

He ordered a lathi charge. As the policemen cut a swathe through the crowds, the traffic started flowing once again.

As Maria headed for Machhimar Colony, he saw that a mob had surrounded a BEST bus, and was dragging out and beating up people. As he stepped out of his car and moved towards the bus, he saw an old man being beaten up. As the attackers seemed undeterred by the presence of a uniformed police officer, Maria pulled out his service revolver and fired into the air. The assailants scampered away, and Maria picked up the victim and had him sent to the Bhabha Hospital at Bandra.

It was due to the efforts of officers like Maria and Pawar that a communal riot was averted in Bombay that day. Though each member of the police force performed nobly on that and subsequent days, many going without sleep for forty-eight hours as they kept watch, Samra later wrote in a letter that circulated among the police hierarchy that 'Pawar and Maria were the heroes of the day'.

After the blast at Worli, there were five more explosions, all of which took place at intervals of approximately ten minutes. The Zaveri Bazaar bomb went off at 3.05 p.m., the Plaza Cinema crumbled at 3.13 p.m., and then the dance of death continued in the suburbs. It seemed that all of Bombay had been put on a fast-burning fuse that day.

Arup Patnaik, DCP of Zone VII, in the northwest region, had had it quiet this far. But not for much longer. The northwest region extended from Bandra to Dahisar, and covered the entire western suburbs of the city. At 3.20 p.m., the seventh blast of the day was reported from the high-rise Hotel Sea Road in Bandra, scenically located right next to the sea on one of Bombay's most popular promenades, the Bandstand boulevard. When Patnaik reached the hotel, he was stunned by what he saw. There was a gaping hole where one wing of the hotel had collapsed, and the concrete and rubble lay strewn around. By a miracle, no one was killed or injured, but the financial loss incurred by the hotel was the highest of any blast, estimated to be more than Rs 9 crore. The hotel eventually shut down.

Even as Patnaik began investigations, he was alerted by the wireless that there had been two other blasts in his jurisdiction, both in hotels—the Juhu Centaur at 3.25 p.m. and the Airport Centaur at 3.30 p.m. Shortly after that there was another message, informing him that at 3.30 p.m., miscreants had flung hand grenades over the perimeter at Sahar Airport.

Ten explosions rocked Bombay that day, taking place with almost metronomic precision at short intervals. Between 1.28 and 3.35 p.m. bombs had gone off across Bombay, the first time any city in the world was subject to serial blasts. The city was soon to spring back to its feet, but its severe lack of infrastructure to tackle a crisis of such proportions was exposed.

A city with a population of over thirteen million had only 1,500 firemen and forty-five fire engines. The fire chief, Durgadas Kulkarni, later lamented that had he had more men at his command, more lives could have been saved. The hospitals where the injured were brought were unable to cope with the crisis of this magnitude. JJ Hospital put all its five operation theatres at the disposal of the injured, but this was inadequate for the needs of the 138 people admitted. Forty-five of the victims admitted there were to die of their injuries. As many as 135 people were taken to St George Hospital, the remainder to JJ Hospital and GT Hospital. Some patients were later transferred to private hospitals.

Rumour mills worked overtime, and even government news agencies were not immune to them. Doordarshan, the sole, government-run Indian television channel, reported that the B.Y.L. Naik Hospital at Agripada was damaged in a blast, while the BBC reported that between 700 and 800 had been killed, a figure dismissed by Chief Minister Sharad Pawar. At his press briefing in the evening

Pawar put the figure at a conservative 100 killed and 500 injured. Subsequent police investigation revealed that 257 persons were either killed or went missing in the blasts while 713 were injured. Property worth Rs 27 crore was destroyed.

The worst carnage was at Worli. The maximum financial damage was at Hotel Sea Rock. At the Juhu Centaur, three people were injured; at the Airport Centaur, two hotel employees were killed and eight others injured.

At 4.30 p.m., the police wireless crackled, 'The king is coming.' That was the code for Samra. After a whirlwind visit to the BSE and the Air-India building, he was proceeding towards Century Bazaar in Worli when Doordarshan contacted him, asking him to address the public that evening over the metropolitan network, which Samra agreed to do.

After visiting the Doordarshan studios and Century Bazaar, Samra left for the western suburbs. He used the drive to exhort his men over the police wireless to maintain peace and avoid communal incidents.

His Contessa came to a halt at the portico of the devastated Hotel Sea Rock. Accompanied by DC Patnaik, he examined the damage to the hotel. At 10.30 p.m., as Samra was having coffee, his walking talkie came to life, 'Charlie Mike wants to talk to you.' The chief minister and the police commissioner had not spoken a word to each other all this while, as both were engrossed in getting the city back on its feet. They talked briefly about the situation.

Samra then left for central Bombay. Half an hour later, he got another message from the chief minister. This time Samra went to the Bandra police station to talk to Pawar on the telephone. They discussed the conspiracy behind the blasts. 'It is a proxy war,' Samra told Pawar. 'It seems to be a serious bombing; plastic explosives were used and not gelatin.'

For Samra, the serial bombing was a reminder of the recent and chillingly similar car bomb blast at the basement of the World Trade Centre, New York on 26 February, less than a month earlier, and of the bomb blast in the PanAm flight over Lockerbie in 1991.

Since the riots, the army had been stationed in Bombay. That night fifty columns of the army and a hundred platoons of the police State Reserve Force (SRF) were posted on the roads. As the long and terrible day finally came to a close for most Bombayites, for senior police officers, there was still work to be done.

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