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Bombay High Court Acquits All 12 Accused in 2006 Mumbai Train Blasts Case, Cites Prosecution's Failure

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In a landmark ruling, the Bombay High Court on Monday acquitted all 12 individuals previously convicted in the 2006 Mumbai train bombings, stating that the prosecution had “utterly failed” to prove its case. The judgment overturns a 2015 verdict by a special

Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) court, which had sentenced five to death and seven to life imprisonment.

The attacks, which occurred on July 11, 2006, targeted Mumbai's suburban railway network during the evening rush hour. Seven pressure cooker bombs exploded on trains traveling on the Western line, killing 189 people and injuring over 800 in one of India's deadliest terrorist incidents.

The division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Gauri Godse ruled that the evidence presented by the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) lacked credibility and consistency. The judges highlighted serious flaws in the investigation and prosecution, including delayed witness identification, contradictory statements, and uncorroborated confessions.

"This is a classic case where the prosecution has utterly failed to prove the guilt of the accused beyond a reasonable doubt," the court stated in its verdict.

The High Court also noted the unusually long delay of over 100 days in the identification of the accused by key witnesses. It deemed this "very abnormal," casting doubt on the reliability of the testimonies. Additionally, the court ruled that confessions recorded under MCOCA were inadmissible due to procedural lapses and possible coercion.

Of the 13 individuals convicted in 2015, only one, named Sohail Shaikh, had died due to COVID-19 complications in 2021 while in custody. The remaining 12 will now be released unless they are wanted in other cases.

Following the acquittals, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis expressed strong disapproval of the judgment and announced the state's intent to file an appeal in the Supreme Court. "It is very shocking. We will challenge this verdict," Fadnavis told reporters.

Families of the victims and survivors reacted with disbelief and disappointment, questioning the integrity of the investigation and the state's ability to deliver justice. Legal experts have also raised concerns about the case, labeling it a serious failure of the justice system and emphasizing the need for improved investigative standards.