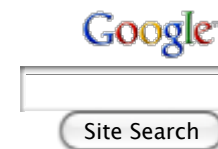


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As siege ends, Mumbai mourns its dead

Meena Menon and Rahi Gaikwad

9 terrorists killed, one arrested; 20 security personnel among 183 who lost their lives

— AP



A job done: A commando shows the victory sign from a window of the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai on Saturday morning, soon after the siege of the hotel ended.

MUMBAI: The raging fires and fierce gun battles came to an end on Saturday morning as the city came to grips with one of the worst terror attacks it has



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ever faced. Sixty hours after terrorists took over the landmark Taj Mahal hotel, the massive operation by the National Security Guard (NSG) came to a close around 8.30 a.m. on Saturday. Four terrorists were killed and the hotel is being "sanitised."

A total of 183 people lost their lives in the attacks — 20 security personnel, 141 other Indians and 22 foreign nationals. The number of injured persons has been put at 327.

The heavily armed terrorists could have killed at least 5,000 people in Mumbai, said Deputy Chief Minister R.R. Patil. They were so heavily armed and so well prepared that the damage could have been catastrophic, he added.

Nine terrorists were killed and one arrested. The arrested person, Mohammed Ajmal Mohammed Amir Kasab, was remanded to police custody till December 11.

Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh said there was no evidence that two of the terrorists killed were British Pakistani nationals. The nationalities of the terrorists were being ascertained.

The final leg of the Taj operations began around 3.35 a.m. on Saturday with a wave of five explosions and heavy firing. A few minutes later, the combat got more intense as seven powerful explosions rocked the hotel within a span of 90 minutes. The firing too became heavy and incessant. Two huge fires engulfed rooms of the first and second floors and firefighters got into the action.

After the fires were doused, it appeared the end was in sight. Later, J.K. Dutt, who was in charge of the NSG operations, told the media that the operation had come to an end as the remaining three terrorists were killed. One was shot dead on Friday.

He said 22 bodies had so far been removed from the Taj, and work was still in progress. The body count could be much higher.

The city is far from normal and the horror of the terror attack continues to haunt its citizens. The Trident and Oberoi hotels, the scene of fierce gun battles and blasts, were cordoned off by the police and the Rapid action Force, while cleaning up operations are under way. Chairperson of the Oberoi Group P.R.S. Oberoi said that while Trident was sanitised, he still could not enter the Oberoi.

Police and security agencies have taken over the Nariman House, where terrorists were holed up for over two days.

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Mr. Deshmukh said the whole city was relieved that the three major anti-terror operations were over. He said the State had written to the Centre for an NSG battalion till it could raise one of its own.

About 350 NSG and 400 police personnel worked for three days on end to bring the situation under control. There was no hostage situation and no demands were made by the terrorists, the Chief Minister pointed out.

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