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Today's Edition

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Three theatres of war Blind combat at Jewish centre

CHARU SUDAN KASTURI



Nariman House at Colaba market. (PTI)

Mumbai, Nov. 27: Armed terrorists fended off security forces for a day to hold Indian and Israeli Jews hostage at an office-cum-residential complex here, threatening to inject a flavour of West Asia's troubles into India's battle against terror.

Cradling AK-47s, two armed men entered Nariman House late last evening and started firing at residents, killing at least one, before holding the rest hostage, according to security officials battling the terrorists. Of the two, one man has been killed, a Rapid Action Force official said. The other armed man, however, was still hiding inside the residential quarters of the complex till late evening, intermittently firing a shot, as if in warning.

The security forces are not ruling out the possibility that other accomplices of the terrorist may be hiding in the complex, the RAF official said. The armed man inside is also carrying hand-grenades, he said. "But we are confident of completing the operation soon." Officials suggested they might launch their "biggest attack" under cover of darkness.

A rabbi, Gavriel Holtzberg, the Mumbai emissary of ultra-orthodox Jewish group Chabad Lubavitch, was among those being held hostage. It wasn't clear how



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many people were still inside but officials said the figure was not less than a dozen. Chabad spokesman Moni Ender said in Tel Aviv there were eight Israelis inside the house, including Holtzberg and his wife.

Their two-year-old son was saved by Nariman House cook Sandra Samuel, who ran outside with another worker around 10 this morning, almost 12 hours after the siege began. They are the only ones to have emerged.

“I took the child, I just grabbed the baby and ran out,” recalled Samuel, 44, adding she saw four people lying on the floor, apparently “unconscious”, as she ran out. The baby, whom she identified as Moshe, was unharmed but his blood-soaked pants spoke of the horrors inside.

An Israeli team of paramedics and medics has left for Mumbai to help in the rescue efforts amid an offer by Tel Aviv to assist New Delhi in dealing with the aftermath of the attacks, PTI said. The team will help treat casualties and locate missing persons in co-ordination with the foreign ministry and the International Red Cross.

A sprawling complex not far from the besieged Taj hotel, Nariman House holds several offices, some residential quarters and a Jewish prayer hall, locals said. Most of the offices are run by Jews. Through the day, commandos of the National Security Guard led several attacks against the terrorists, with the RAF providing cover, eyewitnesses said.

Mumbai police maintained security at the periphery of the complex, wielding the occasional *lathi* to keep curious onlookers at bay.

The two armed men who entered Nariman House last night arrived on a scooter and lobbed a grenade at the gas station where Khalid works. They missed the dispensing units but hit the façade of the gas station, before rushing into Nariman House.

Islamic groups in West Asia have frequently targeted Jews, but the community has not been marked out for attacks in any of India’s major terror strikes so far.



Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and two-year-old Moshe

