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Front Page

AdChoices **Geheimtipp
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News: ePaper | Front Page | National | Tamil Nadu | Andhra Pradesh | Karnataka | Kerala | New Delhi | Other States | International | Business | Sport | Miscellaneous | Engagements |

Advts: Retail Plus | Classifieds | Jobs | Obituary |

Front Page

**Calm returns to Oberoi/Trident**

Meena Menon



Flames leap out of a window of Trident hotel in Mumbai when National Security Guard commandos were battling the terrorists on Thursday. Photo: PTI/Shashank Parade

MUMBAI: After two days of frenzied activity and a warlike situation, things appeared calm on Saturday morning near the Oberoi/Trident hotel. A small group of anxious shop owners stood outside the police cordon near the hotel, hoping they would be allowed inside to check the extent of damage.

Ahmed (name changed), owner of a carpet shop in the famous Oberoi shopping arcade, was relieved that the terrorists did not target the area. "I was playing soccer at Islam Gymkhana when I was told about the attack. I heard the two terrorists entered the lobby of the Trident and turned right, shooting everyone in sight," he said. None of the 30 shops in the arcade are damaged, reports say.

**News Update****Stories in this Section**

- e-mail came from Pakistan
- As siege ends, Mumbai mourns its dead
- Too early for Directors General to meet: Zardari
- Zardari: if evidence points to any group in my country, I shall take the strictest action
- We are duty-bound to help: Mulford
- Pointed intelligence warnings preceded attacks
- Thousands bid tearful adieu to bravehearts
- Calm returns to Oberoi/Trident
- Mumbai Aftermath
- Beyond the line of duty
- How the Taj — the war zone — was reclaimed
- Ratan Tata asserts his resolve
- Taj denies staff involvement
- They battled the flames
- Don't come up, I will handle them, said the hero
- Labradors play key role in operation
- Why the action took as long as it did
- Heritage building stands ravaged

Two months ago, the hotel management sent a circular of a possible security threat to the place, and even parking near the hotel entrance was suspended, he said. But after that, things turned lax. "Once, I was carrying a laptop and the security checked me but those with huge bags are allowed freely," he complained. Eyewitnesses said the two terrorists got off from a vehicle right at the entrance to Trident and started shooting from their machine guns. The incident reminded some of the shop owners of the raging fire that destroyed much of the hotel way back in 1990.

"It's a double loss for me. My garment shop is inside and I hope it is not wrecked. But I lost two of my friends – a couple who lived in my apartment complex," said another distraught woman. "Monica and Ajit Chabria will always remain in my memory. They have such lovely children," she said. The couple were dining at the hotel when they were killed. "The hotel management is so lax – they did not even repair the escalator in the arcade which became defunct after the 1990 fire. It was the first-ever escalator in the country in a shopping arcade," she pointed out.

While things at the Oberoi seem to have calmed down, P.R.S. Oberoi, chairperson of the Oberoi Group, told the press that four resident guests, 18 visitors who were dining in the hotel restaurants and ten staff members lost their lives in the attack. Nine people are in hospital with injuries, including two staff members.

He said 135 guests were evacuated from the Oberoi and 316 from the Trident. He commended the staff for their courage. He was a guest at the Oberoi hotel in one of the suites. "I left about one-and-a-half hours before the attack for an award ceremony in North Mumbai. I had the good fortune not to be there," he said. He heard about the attack but was told not to return near the hotel.

The attack started between 9.30 p.m. and 10.30 p.m. and things are far from normal even though the anti-terror operation is over.

"I have not even entered the Oberoi, which is badly affected. The Oberoi seemed to be the real target," he said. While Trident is sanitised, work is still going in the Oberoi, he added. At the time of the attack, there were 700 to 800 staff and about 350 guests, apart from 150 diners in various restaurants.

He said the extent of damage was being assessed and he could not say when the two hotels would be reopened. The Trident may be easier to restart while the Oberoi, which took the brunt of the attack, may take longer.

He admitted to sending the circular regarding the need for tighter security a while back after many terror strikes including the one on Marriot hotel in Pakistan. Security in the hotel was not lax, he said. Meanwhile, the Taj hotel

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- [Delhi polls by and large peaceful](#)
- [Numbness to confidence — a forty-hour ordeal](#)
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- [V.P. Singh cremated](#)
- [Wickets fall like nine pins on day one](#)
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- [Is this the most 'creative' game ever?](#)
- [Police lay down security standards for hotels](#)
- [For the departed](#)
- [Job well done](#)
- [Congress wins Pale](#)
- [Avian flu-hit birds culled](#)
- [Chhabildas Mehta passes away](#)

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[Datewise](#)

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