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## "They are going to target every group at every place"

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MUMBAI: Priya Agarwal (31) and her friends were waiting to be served at a restaurant in the Taj when the shooting began. Before they could react, hotel security rushed inside and asked them to vacate the premises.

The confused crowd ran past injured people and bodies on their way out, images that left Priti unable to drive beyond Marine Drive. A top executive at a media company who lives in the suburbs, she spent the night at a friend's place on the seafront where the terrorists are said to have disembarked.

After this nightmarish experience, will Priti and her friends hit a five-star hotel again with the same carefree abandon? This question throws light on a significant change in the world of terror-the target audience. This time it didn't come for the Diwali shopper in a busy market, the homemaker buying vegetables, the stockbrokers from Gujarat, the office-goer on his way home in a train. The target was the upper class, the moneyed, the well-travelled, the expat and the foreigner.

Bangalore-based historian Ramachandra Guha says if the terror suspects have targeted expats, British and Americans in particular, it is possibly linked to the Iraq war. Author and columnist Shobhaa De, however, insists that urban terror does not follow any predictable pattern. But Zeenat Shaukat Ali, professor of Islamic studies at St Xavier's College says "this cowardly, dastardly attack" has been aimed at every strata of society. "It started with the railway station and moved to elitist groups. They are going to target every group at every place. That's the message they want to send."

Whatever the analysis, it is a fact that the elite have been targeted. They may never have stinted on leisure, but stark fear could now cramp their lifestyle, at least for some time. Reesha Durlabh, who was at Dragonfly, the nightclub opposite The Trident, returned home on Thursday after spending the entire night here. A shaken Reesha says she will be scared every time she goes out. Diago Pereira, who was with her, agrees that he too is feeling a little paranoid at the moment. "For the first time in my life, I made a confession right out there."

De and her husband were at The Four Seasons Hotel for a sit-down dinner hosted by the French ambassador. "We were advised by the police to stay put which is exactly what we did. We left the hotel at 5 am. It was the longest night of my life." However, De says one does not put one's life on hold because of terror and one must not.

Many are also pointing to the security lapses at the five-stars. Ali fumes, "I am a Rotarian. When we have our lunch meetings at the Taj, our bags are thoroughly checked How did these terrorists get inside five-stars with their big bags (of explosives)? From which doors or windows did they enter?"

But dancer Sandip Soparrkar says security has improved at Juhu's J W Marriott. "They didn't let me park the car near the hotel on Thursday. And the person I was supposed to meet at the hotel had to come down and pick me up to take me inside. It no longer allows people in without a reservation." Soparrkar says he goes to the hot three or four times a week, but they rightly did not make an exception for him. "That is their job. They are taking care of our security."

Farzad Virji of Poly Esther's says the nightclub has already hired more security personnel and will hammer out concrete measures soon. "As of now, we are stuck to our TVs," he said.

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