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# Nariman House turns battleground

**Kiran Wadhwa & Kanchan Chaudhari**, Hindustan Times  
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Hours before he could turn two, baby Moshe lost his parents in the Nariman House terror attack. The bodies of his parents, Rabbi Gavreil Holtzberg and wife Rivka, were among the five pulled out of the building at the end of Operation Black Tornado on Friday evening. "Rabbi Gavriel and Rivka Holtzberg, directors of Chabad-Lubavitch of Mumbai, were killed during one of the worst terrorist attacks to strike India in recent memory," the Jewish site chabad.org news said.

The Nariman House encounter ended around 9 p.m. on Friday — 48 hours after terrorists took Jewish people hostage—leaving five hostages, two terrorists and one NSG commando Gajendra Singh dead. "We have captured Nariman House. We had to tread carefully as it was a populated area," said J.K. Dutta, director general, NSG.

Three bodies of the hostages were found on the second floor and the two terrorists were shot on the fourth floor, where bodies of two more hostages were found.

The façade had changed dramatically in 12 hours. From a simple,

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white building housing Jewish families in a narrow bylane, the building turned into a battleground with walls blown apart and shattered windows.

The Rabbi, his wife and six other Jews, including Holtzberg's two-year-old boy Moshe, were held captive by the militants. Two, however, were rescued with Moshe on Thursday.

"I kept dialing their cellphone every second since the moment I heard of them being kept hostage," said Shnior Kup, a family friend of the Rabbi.

Kup, who is in his mid-twenties, did not know whether the Rabbi was alive when he spoke to HT on Friday. "The baby is under my care." Kup said that it is Moshe's second birthday on Saturday. "He is crying for his mother. I don't know how to console him."

There were tense moments prior to the official end of the encounter when crowds gathered around the building stormed into the cordoned area assuming that the operation was over as some saw commandos emerge from the building and thought it was the end of the 48-hour ordeal.

The security forces had to lathicharge the surging crowd chanting slogans like Bharat Mata ki jai to disperse them. Announcements were made that the NSG was still to gain control of the last floor of the building.

Action at Nariman House began at 7.30 am after 23 NSG commandos were airdropped by a helicopter.

Keeping in mind the possibility of the terrorists possessing sophisticated weapons, the commandos entered the building from the fifth floor. They had to carry out their operation cautiously as there was a petrol pump nearby and any wrong move could have proven hazardous.

Both sides were engaged in a gun and grenade battle. The NSG, deployed in six buildings surrounding Nariman House, also attempted to enter.

Terrorists, hiding behind heavy orange curtains, were lobbing grenades from an apartment on one of the higher floors of the building. Frugal with their use of ammunition, they hurled hand grenades only when commandos got too close.

After a brief break between 12.32 pm and 3 pm, the action resumed even as onlookers thronged the bylanes leading to the building.

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Gopinath Rao, a technician, had come from Parel to watch the operation. "I have never seen a commando and a friend who lives close by asked me to come over and watch the action," he said.

Around 4.40 pm, as commandos reached the fourth floor, there followed at least six explosions. An hour later, sources said, they placed an explosive on the fourth floor and carried out a controlled explosion. The intensity of the explosion was so strong that it blew apart the entire floor.

Nariman House, which houses the Chabad House, is inhabited by Israelis and Jews. Chabad is a network of such places operated by a Jewish organization, which provides shelter to Jewish and Israeli travellers.

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