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Survivor tales of Mumbai terror attacks

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Of course I will be back: Sir Gulam Noon Vijay Dutt and IANS London: Two British tycoons were caught in the terror strike at Mumbai's Taj Mahal Hotel. One, Mumbai-born Sir Gulam Noon lived to tell the tale. Yacht tycoon Andreas Liveras, 73, did not. Liveras was the only Briton to die in the attack.

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Also known as Curry King, Noon had booked a table for four — his brother and two businessmen were the guests — at one of the hotel's restaurant, but decided to have the meal in his hotel room because he felt unwell. That saved his life as the restaurant was among the first place attacked by the terrorists.

This is the second time that Noon had a tryst with terror in Mumbai and had a miraculous escape.

He was staying at the Taj Mahal Hotel during the 1993 bomb blasts but

was not hurt.

Noon sounded shaken when he spoke to HT from Mumbai as he stood outside the building. "I was locked up in my room from 9 pm to 6 am, without electricity, water or food."

He was asked to barricade himself in his room until help reached him and he did so. "I heard footsteps in the corridor and occasional shots being fired. I had intended to dine in the restaurant but felt a bit unwell and ordered food from the Room Service. It saved my life."

Sir Noon, who always stays at the Taj whenever he goes to Mumbai, told HT, "I have been shifted to Taj President and have said on television that India's Home Minister must resign. This is done everywhere, ministers take responsibility for security failures and go."

He, however, refuses to give up on Mumbai. "Of course, I will be back. Mumbai and India are my home. If I do not come home, these terrorists would win. We can't allow that."

On the effect of the terror on the economy, he said: "It will take time. But we all are resilient and help restore the economy to health." He said effort should be made from now to restore confidence of investors.

Unlike the Curry King, multi-millionaire Liveras was not lucky. He had gone to the Taj for dinner on Wednesday night because he heard they served the best food in the city and was among the first few to fall to the gunmen's bullets.

But Liveras had spoken to a BBC journalist shortly before he died. He had said: "We hid ourselves under the table and then they switched all the lights off. But the machine guns kept going, and they took us into the kitchen, and from there into a basement, before we came up into a salon where we are now.

"There must be more than 1,000 people here. There are residents and tourists and locals. We are not hiding, we are locked in here — nobody tells us anything, the doors are locked and we are inside. All we know is the bombs are next door and the hotel is shaking every time a bomb goes off. Everybody is just living on their nerves."

Liveras was pronounced dead on arrival at St George's hospital at 9.30 pm on Wednesday.

'Mother is dead; they killed her'

The chatterjees were planning to start a new life in their hometown kolkata.

That plan is still on, but with a tragic twist.

George Chatterjee (50), who had retired three months ago from his job at a courier firm in goregaon, lost his mother to terrorists' bullets.

The family was to leave for kolkata by geetanjali express at 6 am from cst station.

Chatterjee, his mother meera and wife shobha reached the station 12 hours in advance at 6 pm on wednesday from their nalasopara residence.

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Since they were leaving the city forever, they had a lot of luggage; so after dropping his wife and mother at the station, chatterjee left for home to get the remaining luggage.

"At 9.50 pm when i was returning, i called my wife, but she didn't answer the phone. after 10 minutes she called back but her voice became unclear with every word she spoke," said chatterjee. "all i could hear was: 'mother has been killed; they killed her'."

A stunned chatterjee rushed to the station — and then st george hospital.

"my mother was shot in her back and neck by the terrorists," he said, dissolving into tears. "i feel i have been deserted to face life on my own."

— *Bhavika jain*

### She was meeting chat buddy

Twenty-six-year-old Meetu Asrani, a resident of Charkop, set out excitedly on Wednesday evening to meet an American 'chat' buddy she had met on a social networking site.

She never returned.

She was among the first victims of the terror attack at Café Leopold.

"She was friends with this 45-year-old woman, Lean, who had come to Mumbai for a holiday," said Sunita Chauhan, a close friend who studied with Asrani at Jai Hind College. "They had decided to meet at Café Leopold where Meetu was helping Lean to plan her holiday in India."

Sounds of sobbing filled the Asrani household at Sector 3 in Charkop on Friday. Her father Arjun and brother Sunil had left with the body for the funeral at 11.30 pm.

Before she left for what would be her last trip, Asrani had spent most of her day watching a movie on television.

She was expected to be back home for dinner.

Instead, her body was claimed from Sion hospital, her relative Anurag Gupta said.

"She was extremely creative and Balaji Telefilms had taken her on as a creative associate, a post she was yet to assume," Chauhan said. "She was very happy and excited that she finally found a job she was looking for."

For Asrani's kin and friends, intense grief is mixed with anger. "We expect the government to do something to prevent such young promising lives to be finished this way," said Kranti Gupta, a relative.

— *Sayli Udas Mankikar*

### A guiding star fades

Mohit Bhatia and his classmates can barely believe that their beloved biology teacher Roopinder Randhawa (54) will never teach them again.

Randhawa, a senior teacher at Cuffe Parade's BD Somani International High School, was shot dead by terrorists inside the Taj hotel on Thursday morning.

"She was our guiding star," said Bhatia. "We will always remember her smile that we would call the 'evil' smile as it would get bigger before announcing a test in class."

Randhawa, a resident of Cuffe Parade, had gone for dinner at the Taj with her husband to Shamiana, a restaurant in the hotel.

"While they were having dinner, they heard gunshots followed by a loud bang. The hotel management asked them to crouch and hide behind the furniture," a neighbour said, requesting that her name be withheld. "At 5.30 in the morning when somebody said it was safe, she got up but was shot by a terrorist."

Randhawa is survived by her husband and two daughters who are settled in the US.

Her students remember her as a dedicated teacher.

"Her enthusiasm and dedication towards her work was something I have imbibed from her," said her former student Radhika Sheth of Cathedral School where Randhawa earlier taught. "I don't remember a single day when she had declined any student's request."

*Bhavika Jain*

### NCP MP survived on a bottle of water and fruits

*Ketaki Ghoge*

For 40-odd hours NCP MP Jaisingrao Gaikwad Patil was inside room 319 in the old building of the Taj Mahal Hotel.

Gaikwad Patil, an MP from Beed, who along with a group of MPs were in Mumbai for a Parliamentary Committee review, decided to skip dinner on Wednesday. He stayed back in hotel and was working on

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his laptop when he first heard firing sounds and dismissed them as firecrackers. Ten minutes later, he locked his room after suspecting something amiss and was soon informed by hotel staff that terrorists had taken over.

"I was told not to open the room door at any cost unless some one from the security agencies calls me. They were two very lonely nights," he told HT.

Gaikwad Patil survived on one bottle of water and four fruits over the last 40 hours. He worked on election campaign plans on his laptop to divert mind, as fierce operations raged on.

But, he was also among the few trapped who were in touch with his family throughout the ordeal.

"It was very scary. We knew he was safe in his room but there was no certainty and peace till he was rescued today around 3 pm," said Raju, his eldest son.

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### MPs pulled out of Taj after 42 hrs

*Zia Haq*

New Delhi: Two members of Parliament (MPs) hiding in their rooms in the terrorist-besieged Taj Mahal hotel were pulled out by commandos as evening approached on Friday.

MPs Lal Mani Prasad from Uttar Pradesh and B.G. Patil from Maharashtra were whisked out of their third-floor rooms and the hotel around 3 pm, ending 42 hours of anxiety. The two were part of a four-member lawmaker team that had checked in some time before the terrorists took the hotel on Wednesday, but of which two managed to escape.

Krishnadas, MP from Palaghat in Kerala, and Godhra MP B.P. Solanki were down for dinner at the Shamiana restaurant when the bloodshed reached the Taj, and just about got out.

Prasad and Patil could not, and shut themselves up on specific instructions passed on to them by National Security Guard (NSG) via Krishnadas.

"After escaping, I knew I had to do everything possible for the other two MPs," Krishnadas said. "I was working closely with the NSG since yesterday. I was constantly updating them (the MPs). This kept their morale high. It was important to not let them suffer a breakdown."

Krishnadas became a two-way crisis centre of sorts with his [mobile phone](#) as his tool, helping provide details about the holed-up MPs to the NSG and passing on NSG instructions to the MPs.

"After I gave the room details of the two MPs, the NSG said they should lock themselves up and stay that way," he added. "The NSG said they would be rescued only when it was best to do so."

Solanki also did his bit, helping rescuers cart off a group of foreigners, including a bullet-riddled man, a woman with morbid obesity and children unable to walk because of shock.

"I was wondering what to order when we heard a blast," Solanki said. "I thought a gang-war had broken out."

Two gunshots later, he found himself walking over shards of glass through an exit leading to a corner of the Taj swimming pool. In the dark — the pool lights had gone off — Solanki called for help; a police van was on its way.

"In one corner, I saw a group of foreigners, one of whom had a bullet in his leg," Solanki said. "I carried him to the police van that came looking for me."

Krishnadas heads the Parliament's subordinate legislation committee that had checked in for a series of meeting spread over November 28-29; MP Giridhar Gomango was to have joined them on Thursday.

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### Iconic Taj chef mourns lost 'family'

*Aditya Ghosh*

Hemant Oberoi, corporate executive chef at the Taj Group, is disconsolate. "I have lost half my family," he said, breaking down. Six of his colleagues, all star chefs, lost their lives in the terrorist attack on the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower in Mumbai.

Kaizad Kamdin (27), one of the best young chefs in the country, was extremely enthusiastic about his profession. "He wanted to become the best chef in the hotel. It (his death) feels like losing a family member," said Oberoi. Kamdin's childhood friend Sheroy Raj, a Dubai-based airline executive, told HT over phone: "He emailed me recently saying he was tasting success professionally." Kamdin helped everyone out from the kitchen, but lost his life in the bargain.

If Kaizad was one of the best budding chefs in the country, 42-year-old Vijay Banja was already getting there. "He was a talent to reckon with," said Rajiv Gujral, Vice President, Indian Hotels Ltd, which owns the Taj brand.

Banja lived in Colaba along with some of his colleagues in a family suite of the Taj. On Friday evening, the residents of the building were in mourning. "He would go for morning walks every day and buy stuff from my shop," said a local shopkeeper.

Faustin Martis (50) was another Taj employee who was unlucky to be in the wrong place at the wrong

time.

### Last minute change of plan saved former England bowler's life

An unexplained urge to go for a movie instead of early dinner saved former England fast bowler Kabir Ali from a possible run-in with perpetrators of Mumbai terror attack.

Kabir, currently playing for Worcestershire, had been in the Taj Hotel on Wednesday afternoon and was supposed to have dinner there that night.

However, he changed his plan at the last minute. "I should have been at the hotel by 9 pm about half an hour before the shooting started," Kabir said. "I don't know why I changed my mind. For some reason something told me not to go and I went for a film instead. I started watching the film, but it soon became obvious something was wrong. Some people ran out of the cinema."

"Then I received a text telling me what was happening and I got out. There was panic outside. There were sirens and bangs and people running. It was chaos," he was quoted as saying by *The Times*'.

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