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[Front Page](#)



It was the last dinner for many at the Trident

Anupama Katakam & Meena Menon

MUMBAI: For Nitinbhai Mehta, it was a long wait before he learnt his maternal uncle was killed in the first two hours of the terror strike at the Trident Oberoi Hotel on Wednesday night.

On Friday morning, Mr. Mehta was waiting outside the hotel to see if his uncle Kanubhai Patel, 78, would be released along with the other hotel occupants and it was only in the evening that he got the bad news.

Patel was among the 30 killed so far in the terror attack on the five-star hotel.

"My uncle had gone for dinner with three others in Kandahar, a restaurant in the Oberoi on Wednesday when the attack took place. There were two French nationals who managed to crawl out from the kitchen, while the other guest escaped from the emergency window," said Mr. Mehta. The two French nationals were taken to safety while the Indian was admitted to hospital with a bullet wound. "My uncle had a lot of courage and even at this age he was keenly interested in cutting tools business," added Mr. Mehta.

The young hotel staffer who helped them escape lost his life. "We heard that my uncle managed to walk up to the 14th floor from the pool level [tenth floor]. He had diabetes, high blood pressure and Parkinson's disease. We don't know how he managed to walk up," Mr. Mehta said. He also dropped in panic his mobile, which rang till 2 a.m. on Thursday morning. No news about Patel was available till Friday evening when Mr. Mehta finally called the hotel helpline.

For Vijay Banja's family the shock is yet to sink in. An employee at the Taj hotel, Vijay was speaking to his wife Farida till 3.30 a.m. on Thursday. After that the family had no contact with him. When some of his colleagues were rescued from the hotel they told his wife that Vijay had been shot dead.

Vijay told his wife that he and some of his colleagues were in a room near the kitchen. When the terrorists opened fire he was hit.

"He was a really happy-go-lucky man who was always cheerful," said a relative.

Vijay is survived by a 16-year-old son, whose Christian confirmation was to be held this December.

"The family is shattered. Farida will not speak to anyone and the son is in shock."

As the hotel guests started emerging on Friday from the nearby Air India building where they were kept in safety, relatives and friends milled around along with bystanders and the media to welcome them.

The guests were released in batches in buses. Consulate cars took the foreign nationals away. Families grieved openly for their loved ones while the media harangued them for bytes.

A few families took exception to the insistence of camerapersons and had a slanging match with them. The delay in getting any information finally got to the relatives and friends of the hotel guests who insisted on knowing about the status of their friends and relatives.

Few people stuck inside the hotel were willing to speak about their



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- ["A reminder of LTTE methods"](#)
- ["It is a safety net of ideas"](#)
- ["I would say one of those lotteries in life"](#)
- [The lucky ones, and the not so lucky](#)
- [Premature action: Israeli experts](#)
- [Rescue operation ends in tragedy](#)
- [Landmark buildings, target this time](#)
- [It was the last dinner for many at the Trident](#)
- [British media lambasts Modi](#)
- [EC notice to Jaitley](#)
- [Pakistan troops fire at Indian posts](#)
- [Ship with 25 Indian crew hijacked](#)
- [No change in Medvedev's visit](#)

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experiences as they were rushed into waiting vehicles and sped away.

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