

Briton tells of his Mumbai rescue

A British businessman who barricaded himself into a Mumbai hotel room for two days when gunmen attacked has spoken of his relief at being rescued.

Mark Abell was staying at the Oberoi, seized by militants on Wednesday.

He said he had no food, little water and was "surrounded by explosions, gunshots and people screaming" but now he was looking forward to going home.

One British national, Andreas Liveras, died and at least seven Britons were hurt in the attacks on the Indian city.

By Friday, the Oberoi was back under control of authorities after troops flushed out the gunmen.

But police found 24 bodies there after freeing dozens of guests and staff.

Rescue operations are continuing at the Taj Mahal Palace hotel, another of Mumbai's luxury hotels, and a Jewish centre.

Mr Abell's ordeal was one shared by other Britons who also locked themselves in their rooms during the series of attacks.

'Too close'

He told the BBC it had been "very grim" and he had been just a few floors away from the worst violence in the hotel.

"We were too close for comfort and throughout the night, the whole thing was punctuated by a series of explosions.

" The lobby was carnage - there was blood and guts everywhere - it was very upsetting "

Mark Abell, British businessman

"Towards the end of the night it started to quieten down and I was communicating on my Blackberry with other people who were in a similar position and we slowly started to get a picture that we would be evacuated."

After some 36 hours locked in his room, he was rescued by "an entourage of heavily armed military, hotel staff and the police".

Asked what was going through his mind at that point, he said: "I'm going home, going to see my children, going to see my wife."

He then described bloody scenes as he was helped out of the hotel.

"The lobby was carnage - there was blood and guts everywhere - it was very upsetting," he said.

"Just before I went to my room I'd had dinner in the Kandahar restaurant and unfortunately the waitress who served us was one of the first to get shot."

Sir Gulam Noon, another British businessman, was also forced to barricade himself and several colleagues into a room at the Taj Mahal Palace hotel.

He said they were all afraid that at any time the gunmen would kick the door down and, at one stage, smoke from a fire began seeping into the room.

"Then it was a panic situation," he said. "We could feel it in our throats. We knew it was serious."

Eventually, all six were rescued from a balcony by a fire crew, and lowered to safety.

He told the BBC: "I hope, and I'm sure, like Londoners, Bombayites are resilient, brave and will withstand this onslaught on the city."

Pandemonium

Another Briton was not so lucky. Holidaymaker Harnish Patel is recovering in hospital after he was shot in both legs at a Mumbai cafe.

" He headed towards one corner of the bar and saw me and a number of others at the back, and just opened fire on us "

Harnish Patel, shooting victim

He told the BBC how the gunman had been firing continuously and randomly, stopped, then started shooting again.

"That's when he headed towards one corner of the bar and saw me and a number of others at the back, and just opened fire on us," the 29-year-old said.

Other Britons flew home on Friday, shaken but relieved after their ordeals.

Steve Vincent, in India on business, had been in his room at the Taj Palace hotel when the explosions and firing began.

"It was absolute chaos, pandemonium on the streets and people going everywhere, really scary, absolute carnage," he said.

The UK MEP Syed Kamall was part of a trade delegation from the European Parliament staying at the Taj Mahal Palace hotel. He had just left when the attacks began.

He said: "We ended up staying at a restaurant all night. The worst thing was the uncertainty - there were rumours that the terrorists were in a police car and going around shooting randomly."

Gun fire

The attacks have been condemned by Prime Minister Gordon Brown as "atrocious".

The only British national known to have died is Mr Liveras, a businessman who emigrated to Britain from Cyprus.

Mr Liveras, the founder of a luxury yacht business, had been visiting the Taj Mahal Palace to have a curry on Wednesday evening when he was killed.

He became caught up in the violence, and when he spoke to the BBC he said: "I think it's got the best restaurant here. But as soon as we sat at the table we heard the machine gun fire outside in the corridor."

He described hiding under the table and then being led to a salon in the hotel where hundreds of other guests were sheltering.

The Foreign Office is advising against all non-essential travel to Mumbai until further notice.

A reception centre for British nationals has been set up at the British Council Library in Mumbai and will remain open overnight.

The Foreign Office has issued an emergency number for people with relatives in Mumbai: 0207 008 0000.

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/7754190.stm

Published: 2008/11/28 21:13:54 GMT

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