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Mumbai Attacks



Commando troops outside the Chabad center Photo: Reuters



The Holtzbergs' son, rescued this morning Photo: AP

Blast heard at Chabad center

Conflicting media reports suggest several hostages may have been freed from Jewish center in Mumbai, but others claim no one has been released yet. Earlier an Israeli hostage phoned the embassy at gunpoint to relay terrorists' demands

Ynet and agencies

Latest Update: 11.28.08, 00:14 / Israel News

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The Foreign Ministry issued a statement late Thursday evening negating media reports that several Israeli hostages were released from the Chabad center in Mumbai. The ministry also said it was currently appealing Indian defense officials for information on the explosion heard from inside the building a short while ago.

Earlier reports stated that eight hostages had been released from the Chabad house, but a diplomatic source remarked later that the hostages had come from a neighboring building.

Analysis

Why India? Why Now? / Ron Ben-Yishai

Ron Ben-Yishai analyzes terror offensive in India, objectives and motives of perpetrators

Full Story

Gunfire and explosions were heard throughout the day and night from the besieged headquarters of the ultra-orthodox Jewish outreach group and the Taj Mahal and Oberoi hotels, two of the top gathering spots for the Mumbai elite. Throughout the day, commandoes brought hostages, trapped guests and corpses out of the hotels in small groups while fires erupted periodically and firefighters battled the flames.

State officials said 119 people had died and 288 were injured. The Maharashtra state home ministry said dozens of hostages had been freed from the Oberoi and dozens more were still trapped inside. More than 400 people were brought out of the Taj Mahal, and army forces were still scouring the building for survivors early Friday morning.

Late Thursday night, authorities said they had killed three gunmen at the Taj and were sweeping the Oberoi in search of hostages and trapped people.

It remained unclear just how many people had been taken hostage, how many were hiding inside the hotels and how many dead still lay uncounted.

'Drama and confusion'

Foreign Affairs Minister Tzipi Livni spoke of "drama, confusion and conflicting information" in addressing the developing crisis





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following a situation assessment.

Israel's consul in Mumbai, Orna Sagiv, said earlier that the Israeli Embassy in Mumbai received a telephone call in the afternoon hours from a female Israeli hostage being held at the Chabad center. The hostage relayed the hostage-takers' demands under gunpoint.

Various media reports in India have asserted that Indian security forces have launched an operation to extricate the Chabad hostages. Their condition is unknown at present time, but there is serious concern for their lives.

The embassy said the hostage-takers demanded the release of prisoners belonging to their organization who are currently incarcerated in India, but no specifics were communicated. Furthermore the kidnappers demanded the police stop shooting towards the Chabad house if they desire to continue with the negotiations.

The Foreign Ministry said the conversation did not provide any significant new information, particularly seeing as the hostage who made the call was coerced.

Among the hostages are Chabad's emissaries to Mumbai – Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife Rivka. The couple's toddler son was rescued from the house by a cook who fled the premises with him.

Ehud Raz, the senior security officer at the Israeli Embassy in Mumbai, told Ynet that the Holtzbergs' son was unharmed. "The rabbi's son and the woman emerged unharmed, and they are both sleeping at my house. The boy wasn't upset, I'm not sure he understood what was going on.

**Roni Sofer, Ronen Medzini, and the Associated Press contributed to this report**

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