

# Mumbai Terrorists Targeted Jews, Israelis

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The only Mumbai terrorist caught alive told an Indian newspaper that he and his colleagues were sent to target Israelis.

Azam Amir Kasab, a Pakistani, told Indian police that the terrorists targeted the Chabad outreach center, known as the Nariman House, because it was frequented by Israelis, The Times of India reported Sunday. Israelis were targeted to “avenge atrocities on Palestinians,” the paper reported Kasab as saying.

The Times also quoted a source as saying that some of the terrorists killed in the operation had earlier rented rooms at the Nariman House, identifying themselves as Malaysian students, in order to study the building.

“There is no doubt that these attacks were designed, inter alia, to intentionally harm such Jewish institutions,” Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told his Cabinet Sunday. “The government of Israel is doing, and will continue to do, everywhere, what needs to be done to protect Jewish institutions insofar as the matter depends on us and is possible, in the very special circumstances related to events of this kind.”

Olmert praised the Indian government and military for their response to the attacks on 10 sites in Mumbai, which killed more than 170 people and left hundreds injured. Five Israelis were confirmed killed in the Chabad center.

Olmert said Sunday that he was briefed frequently by security and intelligence officials who were “in close touch with the Indian government.”

“At no stage were the issues of whether or not Israel should join the operation, or do things that were within the power of the Indian government and its strong and trained military to do alone, on the agenda,” Olmert told the Cabinet at its weekly meeting. “I am very pleased at the cooperation and would like to take this opportunity to thank the Indian government for seeing fit to update us throughout the events.”

Among those killed in the Chabad house were its director, Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg, and his

wife, Rivkah. Rabbi Holtzberg was a dual U.S.-Israeli citizen; Rivkah was Israeli. A cook from the Nariman House had fled to safety earlier with the Holtzbergs' 2-year-old son, Moshe.

Also slain was Norma Shvarzblat Rabinovich, 50, who was scheduled to make aliyah. Rabinovich, a Mexican citizen, had plans to leave for Israel on Monday to join two of her three children already living there.

Israel has sent a forensics team, including experts on the identification of human remains, to Mumbai, Israeli media reported. The team will bring the bodies of the Israeli dead back to the country.

In addition, Israel has sent a group of anti-terrorism experts to Mumbai to study how the large-scale attack was carried out and who was behind it.

Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who at a Nov. 28 news conference in Jerusalem confirmed the five Israelis' deaths, said extremist Islamist hatred does not stop at Israel's shores.

"In India or elsewhere, there are extremist Islamic forces who don't accept our existence or the Western way of life," Livni said. "It's a shame that this kind of event must remind part of the Western of the world about this reality. The target is not just Israel but the West."

The Chabad center, at 5 Hormusji St., is a popular destination for young Israeli backpackers, who often make the trip after their compulsory army service. The Holtzbergs moved to Mumbai in 2003 from Brooklyn, N.Y., to do Jewish outreach work in India.

Israel Radio quoted Indian security officials as saying that the Israelis evidently were killed at the outset of the attacks and not during the commando raids to free them some two days later.

Gunmen armed with automatic rifles and grenades struck 10 locations in Mumbai on the night of Nov. 26 in coordinated attacks at sites frequented by Westerners, including hotels, restaurants and a railway station. The terrorists also took hostages at the Taj Mahal and Trident-Oberoi luxury hotels.

A little-known organization calling itself the Deccan Mujahideen claimed responsibility for the coordinated attacks. The group had taken responsibility for only a single prior attack. Its grievances were local, but its terrorist tactics are part of a global pattern that includes the most virulent strand of Israel hatred.

The evidence suggested that Jews were targeted deliberately, Livni said. The Chabad House is tucked away at the end of an alley, suggesting that the raid there was not happenstance.

“We have no doubt that the targets of the terrorists were Jewish and Israeli, as well as American and British,” Livni said.

Israel and India have shared common security interests in recent years, and India has become a leading buyer of Israeli arms and weapons technologies. Security teams from both nations happened to be meeting in New Delhi on Sept. 11, 2001; they turned on the TV and watched the attacks in the United States, sharing assessments together.

It’s a natural fit between the world’s most populous democracy and one of its smallest, said Jason Isaacson, the American Jewish Committee’s director of international affairs.

“There’s been close cooperation and consultation between India and Israel on counterterrorism and security,” Isaacson told JTA on Nov. 28 after spending 36 hours in nearly nonstop consultations with AJC’s representative in India, Priya Tandon, as well as with senior Indian, Israel and U.S. government officials. “This is a further reminder that all democracies face the threat of Islamic extremism.”

India, a vast multicultural society, has welcomed Jews for centuries, perhaps as far back as the destruction of the Second Temple. Many believe that India’s first Jews were shipwrecked refugees from the Roman expulsion in 70 C.E.

“There is no fertile ground for anti-Semitism” in India, Isaacson said. “It’s a multiethnic society where Jews have always been comfortable and welcomed.”

Relations were cool during the Cold War, when India’s then-ruling Congress Party assiduously pursued non-aligned status. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s, India expanded ties with Israel, upgrading its Tel Aviv consulate to an embassy and developing robust relations with the Jewish state.

A key element to the relationship has been close ties with U.S. Jewish organizations, particularly in the pursuit of a closer relationship with the U.S. defense establishment. For Washington-area Jewish officials, a must-attend event in recent years has been the Indian Embassy’s Chanukah party.

One component of that relationship was the establishment of the Chabad center in Mumbai.

In a sign of U.S. sensitivity about the relationship, Rabbi Levi Shemtov, the director of American Friends of Lubavitch and Chabad's Washington representative, said he received calls of concern this week from Josh Bolten, the White House chief of staff, and Joe Biden, the vice president-elect.

The Jewish Agency for Israel in a news release Nov. 29 said it would financially assist the Jewish and Israeli families of those killed in the Mumbai attacks from the Fund for the Victims of Terror.

The 8-year-old fund has assisted thousands of victims of terror attacks and their families. Money for the fund comes from the United Jewish Communities, Jewish federations and Keren Hayesod.