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Assam's 'Jackie' also helped baby Moshe escape Nariman House

By Syed Zarir Hussain, IANS,

Kazigram (Assam) : Sandra, the nanny of little Moshe Holtzberg whose parents were killed in the terror attack on the Nariman House in Mumbai, may have received international media attention for saving the baby but the valour of an Assamese youth in the same incident has gone unnoticed.

Zakir Hussain, 23, was along with Sandra and experienced the 13-hour ordeal at Nariman House, all along holding on to the baby, before helping the nanny and Moshe to escape.

Hailing from Kazigram village near Karimganj town, about 340 km from Assam's main city of Guwahati, Zakir was the cook at the Jewish centre run by Moshe's parents, Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and Rivka - both brutally killed by the terrorists.

Zakir's family members were terrified when the Nariman House siege was on - they breathed easy only after they got a phone call from him three days later, saying he was safe but sad that he could not save his employers.

"I feel sad for the Rabbi's family and little Moshe who has been orphaned. But at the same time I am really proud that my son did not run away from the place leaving the baby. I am told my son helped Moshe and Sandra to escape," Zakir's mother Fatima told IANS.

A school dropout, Zakir left for Mumbai to earn a living - his elder brother Aftar too stays in Mumbai and works in a restaurant.

"Zakir wanted to come back to Assam after the incident, but some Jewish people wanted him to stay back and work in the same place once it resumes operations. He is now in Mumbai and working with a Jewish family," said Aftar, who is now at home to care for their ailing mother.

Aftar said his brother learnt to cook kosher meals and was endearingly called 'Jackie' by scores of Jews who stopped by at Nariman House.

The youngest among eight siblings, Zakir's bravery has made residents of Kazigram proud.

"We will organise a grand felicitation to honour Zakir's courage. He could have easily fled the place to save his own life, but his conscience did not allow him to escape leaving the nanny and the baby," said a village elder.

"Terrorism has no religion. A Muslim man saving a Jewish baby risking his own life testifies to the fact that human values are not lost yet," said Nur Mohammed, a community leader.