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# I have learnt to remain calm

**By:** Somita Pal **Date:** 2009-11-26 **Place:** Mumbai



**No tantrums, ma'am:** I didn't know this woman, but she was being difficult and kept asking for a ladder with a cage for the rescue.

**Pics/PRADEEP DHIVAR, SAYED SAMEER ABEDI**

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**Taj - Chitkala Zutshi, K F D'Souza  
Additional Chief Secretary (Home), Colaba station fire officer**

**Chitkala Zutshi:** I was at the Taj with friends for dinner when we heard gunshots around 9.35 pm. We realised it was a terrorist attack.

Luckily, the terrorists didn't come to where we were on the first floor. For seven hours, we were stuck there. I made several calls to policemen and officials I knew.

I also had an additional responsibility because of my job. Around 4.30 am, the firemen finally rescued us.

**K F D'Souza:** At 12.03 am, I got a call about a fire at the Taj. My team and I responded immediately. When we arrived, there was pin drop silence, but no fire.

At 3 am, we saw dense smoke coming out from near the dome. We heard grenades go off and people shouting for help.

Though we were warned by policemen not to go near the Taj, we took the risk.

The next few hours were really difficult. We had to persuade people not to jump from the ledge.

It was tough to rescue the women. Chitkala Zutshi had asked for a ladder with a cage on top for her rescue and refused to come down by the regular ladder.

I had to be stern then. Women in saris and high heels found it difficult to get down by the ladder, but we couldn't do much.

**A year later**

**Chitkala Zutshi:** She's now retired. "It is a new life for me. I am no more a government employee. That is the

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only change in me after a year. But I have learnt one thing be calm when you are faced with an extraordinary situation," she said.

**K F D'souza:** He was one of the seven firemen rewarded with the president's bravery award. "Firemen always have a risk to their lives. But this was the first time we faced terrorists."

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