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November 27, 2008

Commandos battle Islamist gunmen in Mumbai, over 125 dead

1 hour ago

MUMBAI (AFP) — Indian commandos fought to end a multiple hostage crisis Thursday in Mumbai, battling Islamist gunmen holding foreign guests in two luxury hotels after attacks across the city left over 125 dead.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said the militants had come from "outside the country," while the military official leading the operation to flush them out insisted they were from arch-rival Pakistan.

Major General R.K. Hooda told reporters they had "pretended" to be Indian.

Pakistan's defence minister denied any involvement.

Police officials said troops were conducting floor-by-floor sweeps of the Taj Mahal and the Oberoi/Trident hotels, nearly 24 hours after gunmen armed with assault rifles and grenades stormed the buildings.

Gunfire and blasts continued to be heard from both hotels, where scores of guests remained trapped in their rooms -- too terrified to move.

According to hospital sources quoted by the Press Trust of India, nine foreign nationals were among the dead -- including a Japanese businessman, an Australian, a Briton, a German and an Italian.

Americans, French, Israelis and Canadians were said to be among those held or trapped.

There was a separate hostage situation at an office-residential complex, housing a Jewish centre where a rabbi and his family were being held by gunmen.

Guests who escaped the hotels recounted how the gunmen had specifically tried to round up US and British citizens.

Police said the Taj had been cleared of hostages and that more than 40 hostages had been rescued from the Oberoi where a large fire had broken out on the upper floors.

At least five gunmen had been shot dead and one captured, police said. Around a dozen security personnel were also killed, including the head of Mumbai's anti-terror squad.

In an audacious operation apparently tailored to gain maximum international attention, the militants had used small groups to attack at least eight other targets in India's financial hub, including the main railway station, a hospital and a restaurant popular with tourists.

Singh said the attacks were clearly "well-planned and well-orchestrated" and warned "neighbours" who provided a haven to anti-India militants that there would "be a cost" to pay.

An unknown group calling itself the Deccan Mujahedeen claimed responsibility, with one gunman telling an Indian TV channel by phone that the outfit was of Indian origin and motivated by the treatment of Indian Muslims.

Some Indian officials pointed a finger at the Pakistan-backed Lashkar-e-Taiba -- best known for an assault on the Indian parliament in 2001. A Lashkar spokesman denied any role.

Mumbai police chief Hassan Gafoor said more than 125 people had died. "The situation is very fluid and the toll could rise further," he told AFP.

Nearly 300 people were reported wounded.

The main Bombay Stock Exchange was closed until further notice, as were shops, schools and businesses.

England's cricketers abandoned their ongoing one-day series against India.

In a televised address to the nation, Prime Minister Singh said the aim had clearly been to spread panic by choosing high profile targets and "indiscriminately killing foreigners."

Witnesses said the gunmen had been very particular in their choice of hotel hostages.

"They were very young, like boys really, wearing jeans and T-shirts," said one British guest at the Taj, Rakesh Patel, who was among a dozen

people herded together by two heavily armed men and taken to the hotel's upper floors.

"They said they wanted anyone with British and American passports and then they took us up the stairs. I think they wanted to take us to the roof," he said, adding that he and another hostage managed to escape on the 18th floor.

The United States and Britain led global condemnation, with Washington describing the attacks as "horrific," and US president-elect Barack Obama pledging to work with India to "root out and destroy terrorist networks."

India has witnessed a wave of coordinated attacks in recent months.

Another little-known Islamic group, the Islamic Security Force-Indian Mujahedeen, claimed responsibility for serial blasts last month in India's northeast state of Assam that claimed nearly 80 lives.

Six weeks earlier, the capital New Delhi had been hit by a series of bombs in crowded markets that left more than 20 dead. Those blasts were claimed by a group calling itself the Indian Mujahedeen. <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5j-5QIzbFAC7MBs9oRvGEs9ZcyGiQ>

Fresh Explosions Rock Mumbai

Nov 27, 2008

MUMBAI, Nov. 27 (UPI) -- Authorities say fires and explosions rocked Mumbai Thursday, nearly 24 hours after terrorist assaults left at least 125 people dead and hundreds wounded.

New gunfire and explosions were reported at the Oberoi and [Taj Maha](#) hotels and a Jewish center in Mumbai, reported CNN, noting 10 hostages reportedly had been freed from the Oberoi despite a major fire.

At least 30 people remained trapped inside the Oberoi, where gunshots and an explosion were heard late Thursday, CNN-IBN reported.

Teams of masked men Wednesday launched simultaneous assaults on hotels and other "soft" targets in Mumbai's southern [financial](#) district and a building housing members of an Orthodox Jewish group.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said the group that staged attacks is based outside the country.

"It is evident that the group, which carried out these attacks, based outside the country, had come with single-minded determination to create havoc in the financial capital of the country," Singh told reporters, suggesting the attackers had "external linkages." http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2008/11/27/Fresh_explosions_rock_Mumbai/UPI-46361227734380/

Carnage in Mumbai: How the terrorist attacks unfolded

The Islamic terrorists who brought carnage to Mumbai arrived unnoticed in a fleet of small boats before fanning out across the city and executing a series of co-ordinated attacks on Western targets.

By Gordon Rayner, Chief Reporter

Last Updated: 5:41PM GMT 27 Nov 2008



A man with a gun was spied at the Chatrapathi Sivaji terminal railway station Photo: AP

Early on Wednesday evening, and under cover of darkness, dozens of militants are believed to have approached the peninsula in Mumbai, formerly Bombay, in a large boat before lowering dinghies into the water, filled with guns, ammunition and explosives, in which they silently approached the shore.

By 8.30pm local time (3pm GMT) the first of the terrorists were in place at Café Leopold, one of the most popular tourist venues in the city, where four of them took a table and calmly ate a meal without attracting attention from other customers.

When they stood up at 9.30pm, they pulled out guns and began shooting customers at random, claiming the first of more than 100 lives.

Diane Murphy, from Northumberland, was dining with her husband Michael, 59, when the shooting began. "All of a sudden there was automatic gunfire," she said. "The whole place fell apart. My husband and I were hit. Everybody was down on the ground. The gunfire stopped for a few seconds then started again."

Akash Akhinwar, a local dentist, said: "I heard continuous machine gunfire for 15 to 20 minutes and when it stopped and I rushed out to help I saw nothing but rivers of blood."

Within 15 minutes the terrorists had begun storming the hotels which became the main focus of their attack. Explosions rang out at the Taj Mahal hotel at 9.45pm, where the British MEP Sajjad Karim was a guest.

"I was in the lobby of the hotel when gunmen came in and people started running," he said. "A gunman just stood there and started spraying bullets around, right next to me. I managed to turn away and ran into the hotel kitchen and then we were shunted into a restaurant in the basement."

Another British tourist described the terrorists as "very young, like boys really, wearing jeans and T-shirts. They said they wanted anyone with British and American passports and then they took us up the stairs". The unnamed Briton managed to escape when they reached the 18th floor, but dozens of others would remain hostages for the next 24 hours.

Moments later, an attack was launched at the Oberoi-Trident hotel nearby.

Briton Alex Chamberlain, who was in the city on business, said: "They told everybody to stop and put their hands up and asked if there were any British or Americans. My friend said to me, 'don't be a hero, don't say you are British'.

"There was an Italian guy. They said: 'Where are you from?' and he said he's from Italy and they said 'fine' and they left him alone. And I thought: 'Fine, they're going to shoot me if they ask me anything' – and thank God they didn't."

Another guest at the Oberoi, Esperanza Aguirre, the head of the Madrid regional government, was in the lobby when the shooting began.

"I first thought it was windows shattering, but the noise turned into machine-gun fire," she said. "We ducked behind the reception desk."

Moments later, the lobby of the Oberoi was ablaze, and a lucky few managed to escape through a side door, including Ms Aguirre. "I saw pools of blood, which I walked through with bare feet, but I didn't see any of the wounded or terrorists," she said.

By now the attacks were coming thick and fast around the city. One group of gunmen hijacked a police van and drove unchallenged to an orthodox Jewish centre, Nariman House, where they opened fire before taking a Rabbi and several other people hostage.

By 10pm four young men wearing black T-shirts and blue jeans had reached the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus railway station, where they opened fire with AK-47 assault rifles on commuters and threw grenades, killing at least 10 people.

Eyewitness Nasim Inam said: "They just fired randomly at people and then ran away. In seconds, people fell to the ground. I was standing behind. If they had turned around, it would have been me."

By 11pm the merciless terrorists had turned their attention to the hospital which was now trying to save the wounded.

After hijacking another police van, they opened fire on crowds which had gathered outside the Cama Hospital waiting for news of loved ones.

"We felt the ground shake and heard the explosions," said Manish Tripathi, who was standing at a police cordon. "We heard a car speed up behind us, it was a police van, but the men inside were firing at us.

"Men were screaming that they had lost their fingers. There was blood all over."

Other targets included the Metro Cinema; the city's airport, where a car bomb exploded in a taxi, killing three people, and Mumbai's southern police headquarters, where the terrorists kept officers pinned down to prevent them fighting back. "We are under fire, there is shooting at the gate," one officer told Indian television. Three of the city's top policemen, including the head of the antiterrorist branch, were killed.

By midnight both the Taj Mahal and the Oberoi were ablaze, with firefighters bravely trying to bring the fires under control as the killers rained down bullets and grenades.

By 4am small groups of guests were managing to escape from the Taj Mahal, some of them taking off their shoes to minimise the noise as they crept down 20 flights of stairs.

Manrico Iachia, an Italian tourist, made his way down a spiral fire escape. "It was so hot we had to stop three times," he said. "It took us half an hour to get down. Two men carried a woman in a wheelchair down. The most important thing was not to be injured. You are so close to freedom. But what does freedom mean if the bad guys are on the street waiting for you?"

Other guests stood silhouetted in the windows of their hotel rooms, apparently unable to get past the fire. Some raised their fists vainly against the glass; others flicked their lights on and off in distress. A couple took turns waving a white flag.

For the next 18 hours firefighters struggled to control the fires, while commandos tried to storm both hotels, but were continually beaten back both by the flames and by hails of bullets.

As night descends once again on Mumbai, India is holding its breath until it discovers their fate, and that of dozens of remaining hostages in both hotels. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/3531620/Carnage-in-Mumbai-How-the-terrorist-attacks-unfolded-Bombay-India.html>



MIM: According to the report below dated November 28th no one has been freed from the Chabad House which is being stormed by Indian commandos in an attempt to rescue the hostages.

Israeli Hostages Rescued From Chabad House

Cheshvan 29, 5769, 27 November 08 09:01 by Tzvi Ben Gedalyahu and Hana Levi Julian

(IsraelNN.com) Indian television reported Thursday night that there were no Israeli hostages left in the Nariman House building, where Mumbai's Chabad House is located, but it was believed there were still at least two, possibly more gunmen still in the building. Indian commandos had entered the building, said the reporter, and were in the process of clearing the floors of terrorists as they went along. Seven hostages walked out of the building, and several were taken to the hospital.

Combined forces of India's National Security Guards (NSG), Army, Navy, Mumbai Police and Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) were dispatched to battle with pockets of terrorists in various locations throughout the city in continued mop up operations.

A 45-minute exchange of intense gunfire between India government forces and terrorists at the Oberoi Trident Hotel located near Mumbai's Chabad House earlier had led to the rescue of dozens of tourists who were trapped in the upper floors of the luxury hotel.

The terrorists who were holed up in the city's Chabad House had offered to negotiate with India's government for the lives of the Jewish hostages they are holding, but the government said, "No deal." Israel's Foreign Ministry estimated that some 10 to 15 Israelis were being held hostage in other locations around the city as well, including an undetermined number at the Oberoi-Trident Hotel. Foreign Ministry officials said it was impossible to determine an exact number, because not every Israeli registers with the Consulate when they come to the city.

A spokesman for the terrorists who had identified himself to a local television station as "Imran" complained about government treatment of Muslims in Kashmir.

"Ask the government to talk to us and we will release the hostages," he said, speaking in Urdu with what was described as a Kashmiri accent. "Are you aware how many people have been killed in Kashmir? Are you aware how your army has killed Muslims? Are you aware how many of them have been killed in Kashmir this week?"

While government commandos in black caps moved into position for a final assault on the building where the Israelis were being held hostage, the entire area was flooded with light in order to enable the troops to see what was going on the building. "They have a lot of ammunition on them and that is why they are considered so very, very dangerous and the commandos are proceeding with such caution," explained one journalist on the scene.

"It could be a long haul," warned security officials in Mumbai, India as they grappled with the dilemma of how much information to release to the media while making plans to attack the Islamist terrorists who were holding hundreds of British, American and Israeli nationals hostage across the city. "This particular place has many access points and so it is a complex operation to secure it," explained an *NDTV* reporter.

An estimated total of 25 terrorists struck 10 different locations across Mumbai Wednesday night, taking hostages that included top CEOs, tourists and businesspeople. Journalists in India referred to the attack as "Mumbai's 9/11." One terrorist from Faridkot, Pakistan was captured, alive, at the nearby Taj Mahal Hotel.

Chabad-Lubavitch emissary Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife Rivka were both reported unconscious, as were several of the Israelis, according to a babysitter who managed to escape with the couple's one and a half-year-old son Moshe, and called the family shortly after the siege began. The little boy was taken to the home of the Israeli Consulate's security officer until his grandparents arrive from Israel.

Rivka Holtzberg's parents, Rabbi Shimon Rosenberg and his wife Yehudit are currently flying out to be on the scene. Rabbi Rosenberg is the principal of Migdal Ohr Girls' High School in Migdal Emek, which was founded by his brother-in-law, Rabbi Yitzchak David Grossman, winner of the Israel Prize and numerous other public awards.

Two kosher food supervisors who apparently had just arrived in the country, Rabbi Bentzion Chroman, who lives in Israel and Rabbi Leibish Teitelbaum, son of the Volover Rebbe of Boro Park, New York, were also being held hostage.

A previously unknown Muslim terrorist group linked to the international Al Qaeda terrorist organization, calling itself the Deccan Mujahedin, claimed responsibility for the massive multi-site terror attack carried out late Wednesday night in the city formerly known as Bombay. Mumbai

is home to some 15 million people and is India's largest city.

The terrorists struck two luxury hotels frequented by Americans and British nationals, the Taj Mahal Hotel and the Oberoi Trident Hotel as well as the city's largest train station, the Metro Theater and the Cama Hospital with automatic weapons and grenades. Intelligence sources said the level of sophisticated training and weapons employed by the terrorists made it clear that they were not local criminals. The terrorists were armed with AK-47 assault rifles and grenades.

Three top police officials were among at least 125 dead in the attacks, including Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) Chief Hemant Karkare, Additional Commissioner Ashok Kamte and encounter specialist Vijay Salaskar, reported *IBN News*, which said Karkare had received death threats in phone calls at his home within the past several days. More than 300 people were reported wounded in the attacks, and nearly 200 reported taken hostage in various locations around the city. By Thursday night, nearly all had been freed, as Indian commandos continued mop up operations.

The terrorists demanded that India release "all mujahedins," telling a local television station that "only after that will we release the people." American and British nationals were being separated out from among other foreigners and held as hostages, according to one British citizen who told *Sky News* television that he had watched as a gunman asked a group of some 40 hostages for their country of origin. Those who were from Italy, he said, were released, but British and American citizens were held.

Five terrorists were reported dead and 14 police officers were killed as well in an exchange of gunfire at the Taj Mahal Hotel, where thick black smoke billowed from blazing windows on the upper floors. Despite reports that all terrorists were killed, a lone gunman managed to surprise commandos, spraying bullets after a period of quiet as barricaded guests began to leave their rooms. The injured terrorist was silenced by Indian forces.

Movie theaters, entertainment centers and multiplexes were ordered to remain shut due to fears that terrorists were still at large and roaming the city. Schools were closed as well, and it was not clear whether the stock market would be open on Friday.

NDTV reported that Indian security officials believe the terrorists may have infiltrated into the city by sea. There is little regulation in the Bombay Harbor, noted the journalist in his report. Nariman House is located in the southern part of the city, along the water.

The sophisticated terrorist attacks, the worst ever in Mumbai and India, hit as Mumbai is involved in elections. Incoming U.S. President-elect Barack Obama and currently sitting President George W. Bush condemned the attacks, as did French President Nicolas Sarkozy, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and France as the current president of the European Union.

Foreign nationals from Australia, Britain, Italy and Japan are counted among the victims thus far. <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/>

Commandos Storm Chabad House

Kislev 1, 5769, 28 November 08 12:17 by Hana Levi Julian

(IsraelNN.com) Indian commandos are storming the Chabad House in Mumbai an attempt to eliminate the 2-3 terrorists in the building. The fate of the Chabad couple is unknown.

The building, known as the Nariman House, was badly damaged and commandos are engaging the terrorists in a fierce firefight. A loud explosion, probably from a grenade or rocket launcher, was heard on the top floor of the five-story building, which was badly damaged.

No word has been heard concerning the fate of Chabad-Lubavitch emissary Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife Rivka, who were taken hostage at the beginning of the terrorist attack Wednesday night.

Israel's Foreign Ministry has confirmed that two Israeli hostages have been freed in Mumbai after spending more than 30 hours holed up in the Oberoi-Trident Hotel. The two businessmen, who were identified only by their last names, Weingarten and Zamir, were rescued Friday morning at approximately 7:30 a.m. Israel time.

According to Foreign Ministry spokesman Andy David, neither was injured and both are in good condition following their harrowing ordeal. "I can confirm that they're out, they're free... they made contact with our Consulate, our people saw them and they're okay," he told *Israel National News*, adding that both planned to return to Israel but that a timeline had not been set.

The Foreign Ministry firmly denied the numerous and repeated reports by Indian media that Jewish hostages had been rescued from the Chabad House.

"The reports are simply untrue," said David. "No one has been freed there, and no one has come out. We don't know what the situation is inside. There is no confirmation of the number of people there either," he emphasized.

"There are Israelis who stop in there at Chabad all the time, who can visit, get a meal, join a prayer... we have no way to know many people were there," he said. "There is a lot of battlefield fog, you know, we get a lot of reports, 'It's over,' then, 'It's not over,' then, 'It's over,' again."

David was grim regarding the condition of Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife. "Of course we are very worried for them, but we have no information at this point," he said.

An Israeli media report of four bodies being found in the building was brushed aside. "These were old reports by the local woman who brought out the Holtzbergs' one and a half-year-old son when she came out early Thursday morning," said the Foreign Ministry spokesman. The family's babysitter, Sandra Samuel reported when she escaped that four people, including the Holtzbergs, were lying unconscious. She remained with little Moshe until his grandparents arrived from Israel early Friday morning to care for him.

David also debunked a rumor that an Israel Air Force helicopter had been seen flying around the roof of the Oberoi-Trident Hotel late Thursday night. "Not true," he said. "Absolutely not. No Israeli security or military units or personnel or anything of the sort are in India, nor are there plans to send them. Fruitful imagination," he added.

Commandos who entered the building Friday morning were moving "very slowly, deliberately, through each floor" reported an *NDTV* news anchor, who stressed that the cameraman was deliberately "shying away from showing any close-up visuals or pictures that might give away the position of the commandos to the terrorists."

Indian forces are also slowly but surely gaining control of two luxury hotels in Mumbai, and more than 100 hostages have escaped or have been rescued during the fighting.

Operations at the Oberoi-Trident Hotel has been declared over. Reporter noted that relatives crowding around the hotel are "scared and frustrated," adding, "They don't understand why they don't have any news of their loved ones if the operation is over," she said.

Inside commandos continue to methodically search from room to room, trying to determine how many bodies are still inside.

Indian army sources have claimed that the terrorists had received commando training from the Pakistan Army and had been provided with boats and logistical support by the Mumbai underworld, according to India's *IBN Live* television news.

The Chabad House was one of 10 sites that were struck by some 25 terrorists who apparently infiltrated into Mumbai by sea and then fanned out through the city.

Statement from World Lubavitch HQ

Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky of Chabad World Headquarters in New York released a statement on behalf of the movement overnight:

Once again, terrorism has reared its evil head, this time in Mumbai (Bombay) India. Our Chabad-Lubavitch Jewish Community Center, located in Nariman House in the Colaba district, is still occupied by the terrorists.

As of Thursday (Nov. 27) evening, we have not yet heard from our representatives in Mumbai, Rabbi Gavriel and Rivka Holtzberg, who head the center. The Holtzbergs' 18-month old son, Moshe, was rescued early Thursday morning and is in the custody of trusted friends.

Chabad-Lubavitch World Headquarters, through its global contacts, continues to vigilantly monitor this tragic situation as it develops.

We pray for the speedy, safe release of all the hostages and those yet missing, and for the healing and complete recovery of all those wounded. We express heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of each of those who have been brutally murdered in this senseless barbaric attack.

There is also grave concern over the fate of at least two other Jews as well, both of whom had flown to India on business to serve as Kosher food supervisors in Indian plants that provide ingredients to kosher food companies in the U.S.

Rabbi Aryeh Leibish Teitelbaum of Jerusalem, the son of the Volover Rebbe of Boro Park and son-in-law of the head of the Toldos Avraham Yitzhak Chassidic sect, was in Mumbai and hasn't been heard from, as is the case with his co-worker Ben Tzion Korman of Bat Yam.

The public is being asked to pray for Gavriel Noach ben Freida Bluma and Rivka bas Yehudis, Aryeh Leibish ben Elta Nechama .
<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/128597>



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