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"They let them go as they were Muslims"

TNN Nov 28, 2008, 12.46am IST

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MUMBAI: When faced with a volley of gunshots, while sipping coffee at the Oberoi Hotel on Wednesday night, Ali Arpacioğlu, a Turkish citizen on a business trip to Mumbai, chose to escape through the hotel kitchen and down a flight of stairs that opened onto the road outside. This was probably one of the best decisions he took. On the other hand, his business partner, Meltem Muezzinoglu, and her husband, Seyfi, both Turks, when faced with the same situation, dashed out of the restaurant and headed upstairs. When terrorists laid siege, the Muezzinoglus were held hostage.

I was at the Indian restaurant at the Oberoi on Wednesday night, when we heard a couple of gunshots. This was followed by another round of shots, said Arpacioğlu. Diners ducked under their seats in panic. One of the hotel staff, a lady whose hand had been wounded in the firing, led a group of us to safety. Though she was bleeding, she took charge of the situation, and led us out of the restaurant, to safety.

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The Muezzinoglus, however, found themselves in a terrible situation: They found themselves in a hostage situation, along with a group of foreigners. That night, they shared a room with three foreigners all women. Two machine-gun-wielding terrorists stood guard over them the whole night.

All the hostages were asked to identify their religion. When the Muezzinoglus said they were Muslims, their captors told them that they would not be harmed. The other three Caucasian women were removed from the room next day, and the terrorists told the Muezzinoglus that they had been shot.

Arpaciouglu kept in touch with his friends all through the hostage crisis, up until the time they were released the next day. While the hostages allowed the couple to make one phone call to Arpaciouglu at 3am, for the rest of the day, they relied on text messages. The couples final messages read: Soldiers are here now. Soldiers found us.

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