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Jewish centre under siege

Sayli Udas Mankikar & Kanchan Chaudhari, Hindustan Times, Mumbai |

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A full 24 hours after terrorists seized Nariman House in Colaba, several police personnel and over 100 commandos were preparing to strike to rescue the captives.

Nariman House is the headquarters of the orthodox Jewish outreach group, Chabad Lubavitch in Mumbai.

Eight Israelis were taken hostage, said the group's spokesman Moni Ender from Israel. Three were later released.

Security personnel said there were five terrorists in the house who had killed five people. An eerie silence prevailed in the evening after intermittent rounds of firing till 5.30 pm.

Police sources said that a Jewish priest, Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg, his wife Rivka and three guests were held captive. In the morning, terrorists had let the priest's one-year-old son and maid and a 16-year-old boy leave.

Hanif Shaikh, a resident of a nearby building, said that around 9.20 pm on Wednesday four men hurled a grenade at a nearby petrol pump, before running into Nariman House at around 10 pm. Before that they killed two members of a Muslim family in the nearby 'Colaba Court' building.

After remaining silent through the night, the terrorists surfaced again at around 7am in the morning and held people hostage.

One of the terrorists, 25-year-old Imran Babar, within the house had called up a news channel. He said that the Indian army should withdraw from Kashmir and let the Shariah prevail in the Muslim-dominated region.

"The Israelis too have hurt Muslims. We will release the hostages. Ask

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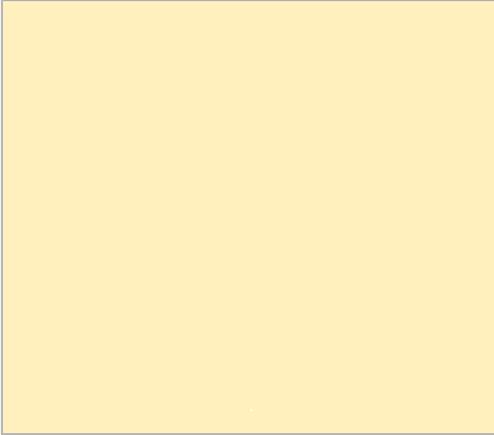
the government to talk to us," he said. "And convey what we have told you to your government, our government and the Israeli government," he added.

The world seemed to be coming together to help the people being held hostage in Nariman House. An official statement in a Jewish journal says: "Chabad-Lubavitch representatives in New York and Israel are working alongside the Israeli Foreign Ministry, the US Consulate in Mumbai and a volunteer team of local residents to ascertain the well being of the Holtzbergs and other Jews in the area."

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