Sisters narrowly escape tragedy with opportuneluncli
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BUKIT MERTAJAM: A last-minute decision to have lunch in their hotel probably saved the lives of three sisters who were at Haadyai, Thailand, when a car bomb exploded last Saturday.

Relating her experience, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) history undergraduate Chiaw Pui Oon, 23, said they were enjoying their meal on the upper floor of the Lee Gardens Plaza Hotel when they heard two loud explosions.

“They started feel uneasy and headed down the lobby to find out what was happening. “The lobby was in chaos when we got there, the chandelier was on the floor, the ceiling had partially collapsed and the windows were blown out,” she said at her home here yesterday.

A bomb hidden in a car parked in the basement of the hotel exploded around noon, killing three people including two Malaysians.

More than 300 people were wounded and more than 130 were still being treated at different hospitals.

As the entrance was full of smoke and debris, the trio decided to head back to their rooms but were advised by another tourist to go to the open-air swimming pool area instead.

Chiaw said they then went to the pool deck before firemen arrived about two hours later to rescue them.

“We were then led down the stairs but it was very scary as the stairs seemed to be heavily damaged by the blasts,” she recounted.

“Upon reaching the ground floor I must have fainted due to the strong smell of gas, because when I woke up I was already in the hospital,” she said.

Chiaw and her sisters, accounting clerk Pui See, 33, and housewife Pui Pui, 32, returned to Penang Sunday night.

Meanwhile, 19-year-old Tan Joo Ni also avoided injury when she and her friend, Angel Ang, 24, heard a loud explosion while having lunch on the second floor of a shopping mall in Haadyai.

“Everybody started screaming and crying after the explosion,” she said, adding that they used a fire exit at the back of the building to get out of the mall as the entrance was blocked by debris and smoke.

Both of them arrived home here early Monday morning in an ambulance deployed by St. John’s Ambulance of Malaysia.