

Mumbai twin car bomb blasts suspec detained

AFP, Mumbai

Indian police arrested a local man suspected in twin car bombings in Mumbai and will charge him under a tough anti-terror law that carries the death penalty, the Press Trust of India reported yesterday.

Zaheed Patni was arrested under India's Prevention of Terrorism Act for the August 25 twin bombings that killed 52 people and left 150 others injured in the heart of Mumbai, the news agency said quoting police.

Patni was arrested Wednesday night when he returned from Dubai after detectives warned his parents to instruct their son to cooperate in the investigation "or face stern action," the agency said.

Police also linked Patni to a July 28 blast on a Mumbai bus that claimed two lives, police said.

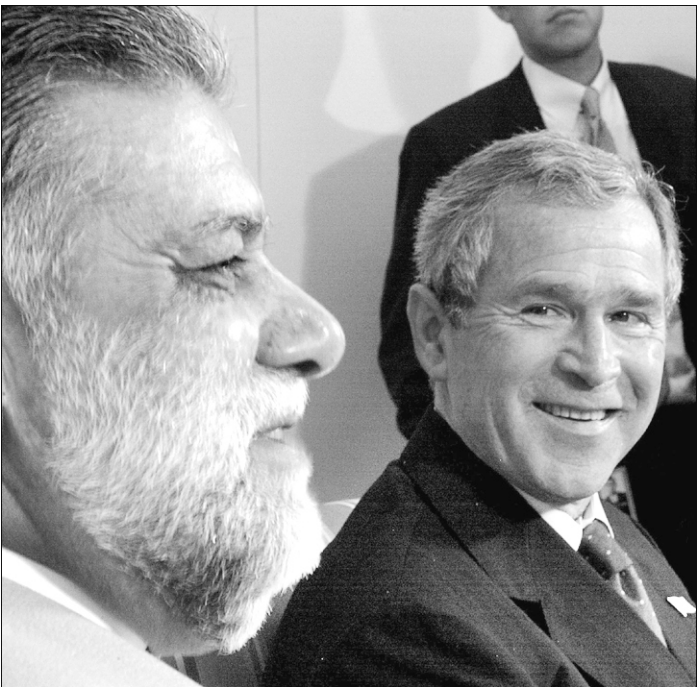


PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan's Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali (L) and US President George W. Bush speak to reporters as they meet in the Oval Office of the White House Wednesday.

Bush-Jamali talk Kashmir, war on terror

PTI, AFP, Washington

The Jammu and Kashmir issue, Iraq, war on terrorism, bilateral relations and security on the Afghan border have figured in talks Pakistan Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali has had with US President George W Bush.

Jamali said Bush assured him that US would play active role to revive the India-Pakistan talks.

"The US will continue to play an important role in the revival of the Pakistan-India dialogue process, to resolve outstanding issues, including Kashmir," Jamali told reporters in Washington on Wednesday after holding talks with Bush over lunch at the White House.

"We believe dialogue alone was the only path to resolve all sensitive

issues between the two Saarc neighbours, especially, the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir. I re-emphasised that Pakistan remained committed to the peace process and expressed the hope that India would reciprocate our goodwill," he claimed.

Without elaborating Bush's response on this issue, he said he would be meeting Secretary of State Colin Powell to review the situation in South Asia. "We would discuss the shift in balance in details and only then it would be possible to comment on it," he told Pakistani media after the meeting.

He said, the issue of India-Israeli defence co-operations, however, did not come up for discussion.

AFP adds: US President George W. Bush and Pakistan Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali met Wednesday

and touted cooperation in the war on terrorism and a mutual desire to deepen bilateral relations.

During a brief public appearance in the White House Oval Office, neither leader broached thorny issues like Kashmir or Washington's worries about attacks from Pakistan into neighboring Afghanistan by Taliban-like fighters.

Bush said a luncheon meeting would focus on "a wide range of issues: our mutual desire to fight terror, our keen desire to bring stability and peace throughout the world" and efforts to broaden commercial ties.

"We want a long, lasting friendship with United States," said Jamali, who expressed hopes Bush would give political reforms in Pakistan "a pat on the back."

Earlier, Bush spokesman Scott

McClellan said Bush and his guest would discuss cross-border violence in Kashmir and efforts to stabilize Pakistan's border with Afghanistan.

"They will continue to discuss cooperation in the war on terrorism, including cooperation in fighting terror on the Pakistan/Afghanistan border area," Bush spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters.

At the request of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, the president raised that issue with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf last week when the two met on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.

The two leaders were also to discuss "regional issues, such as Kashmir," the divided territory over which the two nuclear rivals have fought two of their three wars, said the White House spokesman.

Nepali Maoists begin truce for Hindu festival

AFP, Kathmandu

Maoist rebels yesterday began a nine-day truce called as a goodwill gesture as Nepal celebrates its biggest Hindu festival.

The Maoists' temporary ceasefire was due to begin Thursday morning and by late afternoon security officials reported no unrest.

Clashes with the Maoists, however, are often only reported days later due to the weak communications system in the Himalayan kingdom.

Maoist leader Prachanda last week announced the October 2-10 ceasefire during the Dasain festival,

when thousands of people flock from the cities to their home villages for family gatherings.

Prachanda, whose real name is Pushpa Kamal Dahal, said the nine-day truce was "taken in response to repeated calls from Nepali people, civic societies, political parties and human rights organizations."

But he warned that the ceasefire would be off if security forces launched any attacks.

The government has welcomed the temporary truce and called on the rebels to use the occasion to return to peace talks.

The Maoists, who want to topple the monarchy, ended a ceasefire on August 27 after seven months.

China celebrates National Day with record-breaking marriages

AFP, Beijing

China is celebrating National Day with an unprecedented number of marriages and record-breaking travel, state media reported yesterday.

More than 2,000 couples tied the knot in the Chinese capital alone on the first day of the week-long holiday – the largest number in a single day in Beijing's history, the Beijing Star Daily said.

They were not only taking advantage of the holiday, but new nationwide rules which make it more convenient to get married.

The rules, which took effect Wednesday, mean couples no longer need a special certificate from their employer testifying they are single, and no longer need a health certificate.

They only need their ID cards and residence documents and also need to sign a statement saying they are single.

US high-tech exports ban on India may go soon: Yashwant Sinha

PTI, London

The US may lift restrictions imposed on exports of high-technology items to India, External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha has indicated.

"We have made considerable progress in talks with the US administration to lift restrictions on high-technology exports to India," the External Affairs Minister, who was returning from a trip to New York, told the Financial Times in an interview published yesterday.

In spite of a warning of ties with the US over the last four years, India continues to resent strict US export controls on "dual use" technology to India - products that could be converted for military use.

"Dual use" can get so ridiculous, meaning things such as nuts and bolts," Sinha said. "If these restric-

tions are maintained, it is preventing the US taking advantage of our high-technology market," he said.

The restrictions have hindered the growth of India's civilian nuclear and space programmes and its booming domestic information technology sector, the daily noted.

India will sign an agreement next week with the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) leading to the creation of a full free trade area within a decade, he said.

The framework agreement had been negotiated over the past year, and would be signed next week at the ASEAN summit in Bali, Indonesia. India is also close to signing bilateral trade deals with both Singapore and Thailand.



PHOTO: AFP

Indonesian terror suspect, Mukhlas (C) smiles and waves his hands as he is escorted out of the court room after he received the death sentence on his verdict in Bali yesterday. An Indonesian court yesterday sentenced Islamic teacher Ali Ghufuron alias Mukhlas to death for authorising the Bali bombing which killed 202 people.

Judge spells death for Bali bomber Mukhlas

AFP, Jakarta

An Islamic teacher was sentenced to death by firing squad yesterday after being found guilty of giving the final go-ahead to the Bali bombings which killed 202 people.

Indonesian judges said Ali Ghufuron, better known as Mukhlas, had shown no remorse for authorising last October's attacks, which they described as a "crime against humanity".

"The defendant, Ali Ghufuron... has been legally and convincingly proven guilty of having, together with others, planned an act of terrorism and also of being in illegal possession of explosives," said Judge Cokorda Raka Suamba.

"We punish the defendant with the death sentence."

Police say Mukhlas is a senior figure in the al-Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) regional terror network and the man who authorised the suicide bombings last October 12.

JI staged the attack on Western holidaymakers in the resort island to

avenge violence against Muslims in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

"Allahu Akbar!" (God is greatest!) Mukhlas shouted three times in response to the sentence, rising to face his lawyers and shooting his arms in the air. He said he would appeal "because the law used is not in line with what I believe in."

He is the third Bali bomber to receive a death sentence for the worst act of terror since September 11, 2001 in the United States.

Amrozi, who is a younger brother of Mukhlas, and Imam Samudra are also appealing their sentences despite their professed wish to die as martyrs.

Another brother, Ali Imron, last month escaped a death sentence and was jailed for life after expressing remorse. He has appealed for presidential clemency.

Prosecutors say Mukhlas, 43, helped plan the Bali attack, channelled funds for it and gave Samudra the final approval for the blasts which killed people from 21 countries including 88 Australians.

Suu Kyi willing to work with junta: Diplomat

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi told visiting UN envoy Razali Ismail that she is willing to work with the military junta on a new national reconciliation process, diplomats said yesterday.

"Suu Kyi has said that she's willing to work with (Prime Minister General) Khin Nyunt," said a Western diplomat who attended a briefing given by Razali before he left Yangon after a three-day meeting.

Khin Nyunt last month unveiled a seven-point "roadmap" to democracy in the military-run state, which includes free and fair elections to be held under a new constitution.

Razali, who was in Myanmar to try to advance the roadmap as well as secure Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest, failed to secure her freedom during his talks with the ruling generals, the source said.

Before being confined to her home last week, the National League for Democracy (NLD) leader was held at a secret location for nearly four months in a crackdown on her party which saw its entire leadership put under detention.

"Aung San Suu Kyi told him that she wanted to be released with the others. She doesn't want to be the focus of attention on a one-off release," the diplomat said.

Myanmar's junta is under intense pressure to free the 58-year-old democracy campaigner before a Southeast Asian summit next week which risks being overshadowed by the issue.

But Razali's prospects of securing her freedom were always remote, and his mission was predominantly focused on promoting a reform initiative to end four decades of military rule in Myanmar.

"The bigger thing is the implementation of the roadmap and whether the two sides can work towards it,"

the diplomat said, adding that Razali had said the junta gave no firm indication of when the process would begin.

"There's nothing definite out of it, no timeframe, nothing definitive," he said.

"But the good thing was that he had quite good discussions with both Khin Nyunt and (leader Senior General) Than Shwe and he seems reasonably optimistic that reconciliation talks will start again and that things can be progressed."

However, there was unlikely to be any movement on either the roadmap or Aung San Suu Kyi's release before the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Bali.

"There's even disagreement within the Burmese government as to what her status is," he said, adding that the generals were quibbling over whether the Nobel peace laureate was under house arrest or simply resting at home.

Indian police turn up heat on Maoists

AFP, Hyderabad

Police in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh mounted an intensive probe yesterday into an assassination bid on the provincial chief and vowed to turn up the heat on leftist rebels blamed for the attack.

Andhra Pradesh police chief S.R. Sukumara told AFP that a high-level inquiry would probe how guerrillas belonging to the banned People's War Group (PWG) breached Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's highest category security.

"Though there are no claims so far the nature of the attack and the use of Claymore mines point a finger at the PWG," said Sukumara.

"The probe will not spare either the culprits or security officials," he warned.

Naidu had a narrow escape when mines exploded Wednesday blasting his bullet-proof Ambassador car on a forest road between Hindu temples at Tirupati and Tirumala, but four others were in serious condition.

While Naidu has injured his right collarbone, the four seriously injured are state cabinet minister Gopalakrishna Reddy, two state legislators from Naidu's party and his driver, a party official said.

India to launch 3 satellites next year

AFP, Hassan

India plans to launch three satellites next year to boost the country's telecommunications business and improve rural education, the space program said yesterday.

India will in early 2004 launch the GSAT-3 satellite which will bring educational programs to isolated schools, said P.S. Goel, director of the Indian Space Research Organisation's satellite center in the southern town of Hassan.

He said India will also put into orbit the satellite IRSP-5, which will use 2.5 millimeter cameras for cartography.

"There is no equivalent of such a satellite in the world," Goel told reporters.

Late next year the space program will launch a new communications satellite, INSAT4-A, which will allow more media firms to broadcast directly to homes.

"The satellite ... will cover the entire Indian region and there will be additional transponders for Indian companies. It will be the most powerful satellite in India," Goel said.

India's latest satellite, INSAT3-E, was launched over the weekend in French Guiana through a European mission to the moon.

Afghan envoy says Curbing terrorism test case for Pak ties

IANs, New Delhi

Pakistan's sincerity in curbing "cross-border terrorist activities" in Afghanistan will decide the course of bilateral relations between the two neighbours, according to Afghan Ambassador to India Masood Khalili.

"It all depends on how Pakistan acts in curbing cross-border terrorist activities. We are watching it minute by minute. And if they are able to curb that, the relations will become closer," Khalili told IANS in an interview here.

The Afghan stand on relations with Pakistan, as enunciated by the envoy, is similar to India's condition that Islamabad must first stop cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir before resumption of bilateral dialogue to normalise relations could take place.

Khalili is himself a victim of terrorism having survived with serious injuries a suicide attack by two al-Qaeda terrorists posing as television journalists. It was in that attack in September 2001 that the legendary fighter Ahmed Shah Masood, commander of the erstwhile Northern Alliance, was killed.

Khalili said a "combination of

different elements" in Pakistan was responsible for the terrorists being allowed to cross the border into Afghanistan, but he did not directly reply to a question whether the Pakistan government or the army was involved in it.

"Different elements, a combination of elements, are working to create disturbances in Afghanistan, aggravate it. We are watching it very carefully. The more curb (there is) in cross-border terrorism in Afghanistan originating from Pakistan, the closer the people and government and Afghanistan will move towards Pakistan," he said.

He noted that President Hamid Karzai had met Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf many times and asked him to cooperate in curbing terrorists crossing from Pakistan into Afghanistan.

"They have indeed many times eloquently assured President Karzai that they would try their best to curb cross-border terrorism from Pakistan into Afghanistan."

"But still unfortunately they are crossing the border and creating problems in Afghanistan. That is a source of discontent for Afghan people, international forces."



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (C) prays at the memorial of India's Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi in New Delhi yesterday during a ceremony marking Gandhi's 134th birth anniversary.

Vaclav Havel wins Gandhi Peace Prize

AFP, New Delhi

India has chosen to award its annual peace prize, dedicated to non-violent independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, to Czech dissident writer turned President Vaclav Havel, the culture ministry said.

A jury that included Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee selected Havel for "his outstanding contribution towards world peace and upholding human rights in the most difficult situations," the ministry said in a statement late Wednesday.

The Gandhi Peace Prize, which includes a citation and 10 million rupees (220,000 dollars), is awarded each year to a figure who effects change by peaceful means.

Previous recipients have included former South African president Nelson Mandela and Northern Ireland civil rights leader John Hume.