

## Pak-born man guilty in Sydney 'jihad' plot

AFP, Sydney

A Pakistan-born architect accused of plotting a "jihad" bombing campaign in Australia was convicted on three terrorism-related charges Monday and could face a life sentence.

Faheem Khalid Lodhi, 36, had been accused of planning to blow up the electrical grid in the city of Sydney as well as several defence sites in 2003.

A jury at the city's Supreme Court rejected his claim that he was planning for future business ventures when he used a false name to buy maps of the Sydney grid and inquire about purchasing chemicals.

The indictment said Lodhi, who denied four counts of planning to commit a terrorist act, had "the intent of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause, namely violent jihad."

Prosecutors have linked Lodhi, also known as Abu Hamza, to Frenchman Willie Brigitte, who was deported in late 2003 and has been accused in a leaked French intelli-

gence dossier of planning a terrorist attack "of great size".

Both Lodhi and Brigitte are alleged to have trained with Lashkar-e-Taiba, a militant Pakistani group that Australia has banned as a terrorist organisation.

Lodhi was found guilty on three counts, including writing what the prosecution described as a "terrorism manual." He was acquitted on the fourth charge of downloading aerial photographs of defence sites for a purpose connected with terrorism.

Lodhi showed no emotion as the jury of six men and six women delivered their verdicts on the charges, which carry a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

Judge Anthony Whealy remanded Lodhi in custody to face sentencing submissions on June 29.

If sentenced to life, how long Lodhi would spend in prison before being eligible for parole would be at the discretion of the judge.

Attorney-General Philip Ruddock welcomed the conviction

but declined to speculate on how close Australia had come to a terrorist attack.

"I don't know that it's appropriate for me to try and make deductions as to how far off or when such an event might have occurred," he told reporters.

Australia has not faced a terrorist attack on its own turf but Australian interests have been targeted elsewhere.

In Indonesia, the Australian embassy was attacked in 2004 and scores of Australian holidaymakers were killed in bomb blasts on the resort island of Bali in 2002 and 2005.

After more than 50 people were killed in attacks in London last July, Prime Minister John Howard pushed tough new anti-terrorism legislation through parliament, saying he was afraid the same thing could happen in Australia.

In November, 18 Muslim men were arrested in raids in Sydney and Melbourne that police said had foiled a "large-scale terrorist attack". They are in custody awaiting trial.

## US warns of sanctions if N Korea fires missile

AFP, Tokyo

United States could consider new sanctions against North Korea if it goes ahead with plans to launch a long-range missile, US ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer said Monday.

Schieffer said that a test by the communist state would be a "very, very serious matter" that could be brought before the United Nations Security Council.

"I think sanctions would have to be considered but I wouldn't want to describe what actions we might take," Schieffer told Japanese reporters, as quoted by a US embassy official.

Japanese and US officials say they have seen signs that North Korea is preparing for a long-range missile test, with media reports indicating it could be imminent.

## Time to curb gun trade, says Kalashnikov

AFP, London

Mikhail Kalashnikov, father of the famous assault rifle better known as the AK47, has called for curbs to the international gun trade, The Times reported Monday.

"I don't worry when my guns are used for national liberation or defence. But when I see how wounded people are killed and wounded by these weapons, I get very distressed and upset," the 86-year-old former Soviet general said days before a UN conference on the small arms trade begins in New York.

"I calm down by telling myself that I invented this gun 60 years ago to protect the interests of my country," he added.

The UN will debate an International Arms Trade Treaty at its June 26-27 conference. The treaty, which has the backing of 50 countries, would prohibit the transfer of small arms to governments or armed groups responsible for grave human rights abuses.

"It is imperative to make a decision about introducing strict sanctions on those who violate the terms of such an international agreement," Kalashnikov told The Times.

The Avtomat Kalashnikova #7, named after its maker and the year it went into service in the Soviet army, can kill from 1,500 metres (almost a mile).

Kalashnikov, who is still chief designer at Izhmash the company that makes the AK47 at its factory in Izhevsk in the Ural mountains, attributes the guns popularity to its simplicity and reliability, especially compared with its Western counterparts.

## Rent-a-wife business!

AFP, Mumbai

A shortage of eligible single women has prompted some poverty-stricken husbands in western India to rent out their wives to other men on a monthly rate, according to a news report Monday.

One man allowed his farm labourer wife, and mother of two, to stay with her boss for 8,000 rupees (175 dollars) a month, said the Times of India citing police officials.

Poor families and middlemen have also cashed in on the shortage of women by selling off their daughters to men in Gujarat, one of India's wealthiest states.

Brokers can make up to 200,000 rupees a month from finding and selling wives to single men in the state of some 50 million people, according to the newspaper.

"We cannot take action against this activity as no one comes forward to lodge a complaint," deputy superintendent of police, Naresh Muniya, at Ankleshwar in southern Gujarat, told the newspaper.

"We do not rule out the possibility of minors being married off to the rich," he said.

## Chief prosecutor demands death penalty for Saddam

AFP, Baghdad

The chief prosecutor in the trial of Saddam Hussein on Monday demanded the death penalty for the ousted Iraqi president and two other defendants.

"We demand the maximum punishment for Saddam, (his half-brother) Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti and (former vice president) Taha Yassin Ramadan," Jaafar al-Mussawi said in court as he rested the prosecution case.

The ousted president smiled from the dock as the prosecutor called for him to be sent to the gallows.

Saddam and seven other defendants are on trial for the killing of 148 Shiite civilians from the town of Dujail where the then president escaped an assassination attempt in 1982.

The prosecutor however asked that charges be dropped against defendant Mohammed Azzam Azzawi, a former official of Saddam's ruling Baath party with responsibility for the Dujail area, and that he be released.

Mussawi also asked the court to show leniency to three other local Baath party officials -- Ali Daeh Ali, Abdullah Khadem Ruweid and his son Mezhar Abdullah Ruweid.

The prosecutor said he would



of the session.

"In the next session (on July 10), we will hear the defence team," he added, warning defendants and their lawyers not to "interrupt the proceedings".

Monday's hearing was attended by all eight defendants, but without some of their attorneys.

The judge signalled an end to the defence phase on June 13 even though defence lawyers had asked for more time to prepare their case.

"I want to tell the defence attorneys that we are not going to listen to their endless rhetoric," he said.

The defence has argued that the Dujail residents were executed after due process for an offence that would be a serious crime in any country.

But the lawyer for one of the victims' families told the trial Monday: "The victims had not done anything against the unity and sovereignty of Iraq and the decision taken by the then court was illegal and violated the law."

"The court passed the death sentence on the victims in just 16 days, which itself shows how artificial the court was. We demand maximum punishment for the defendants".

The lawyer was not identified and was not shown on camera for security reasons.



Muslims hold up placards during a demonstration led by Abul Koyair in Forrest Gate in London on Sunday. Koyair's brother was shot by Police during an attempt to arrest them both under suspicion of plotting a terrorist attack.

## Two ex-Nepal royal ministers freed

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Supreme Court has freed two former ministers appointed by the monarchy who had been detained for five weeks by the new government that took power in April, a court official said Monday.

The government that replaced King Gyanendra after mass protests against his absolute rule arrested five former ministers in May, including the home minister who was responsible for a widespread crackdown on dissent.

"The justices decided to release the two former ministers, ruling their detention illegal," said Supreme Court official Ram Krishna.

Former home minister Kamal Thapa and former local development minister Tanka Dhakal walked free Sunday, after the

Supreme Court ordered their release, Krishna said.

The other three, former foreign affairs minister Ramesh Nath Pandey and junior ministers Shris Shumshere Rana and Nikshya Shumshere Rana, were released on June 4.

Gyanendra's rule was marked by frequent detention of opponents including the house arrest of now Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

Last week, seven political parties and the Maoist rebels who allied to remove the king from power agreed to dissolve parliament and set up an interim government.

The rebels and government have also agreed to hold elections to form a body that will rewrite Nepal's constitution, permanently clipping the powers of the king.

## Nepal's SC to review case of Sobhraj

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Supreme Court is to review the case of notorious French serial killer Charles Sobhraj, who was given a life sentence for murder after being arrested here in 2003, his lawyer said Monday.

Sobhraj was sentenced in August 2004 to 20 years in prison after being convicted of murdering two female backpackers, one American and one Canadian, in the Himalayan kingdom in 1975.

The sentence was upheld in an appellate court last August.

"Sobhraj's case will be reviewed in the Supreme Court in a couple of days," his lawyer, Ram Bandhu Sharma, told AFP.

"Two justices from the Supreme Court Sunday decided to summon the government attorney to begin a hearing on Charles Sobhraj after a

petition submitted by Sobhraj himself," Sharma said.

After being spotted in Nepal's capital, the Frenchman was arrested at an all night casino in 2003.

Under Nepali law, the hearing at the Supreme Court -- the nation's highest legal authority -- is his final chance to appeal the 20-year prison sentence, said his lawyer.

Sobhraj previously served prison in India for murder and is suspected of killing at least two people in Thailand in the 1970s.

He earned the nickname "the serpent" for his ability to escape from prison, and has continued to claim his innocence over the Nepal killings.

"I am confident that Sobhraj will get justice from the Supreme Court as there is no evidence that proves that he is guilty," his lawyer said.

## New UN rights body kicks off

AFP, Geneva

The United Nations' reformed Human Rights Council began its first-ever session Monday, with high hopes that it will do more for the victims of abuses and avoid the political horse-trading of the past.

Opening the two-week inaugural session of the 47-nation panel, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said the world was watching -- particularly the victims of human rights violations.

"I trust that all members of the Council are fully aware of the hopes that have thus been raised, and are determined not to disappoint them," he said in the presence of ministers and senior representatives from 100 countries.

The new Council replaces the former UN Commission on Human Rights which was widely regarded as discredited due to the dominant presence of countries with poor human rights records and pervasive behind-the-scenes political bargaining that helped states duck criticism.

"The Council's work must mark a clean break from the past,"

Annan said.

"Never allow this Council to become caught up in political point-scoring or petty manoeuvre," Annan cautioned.

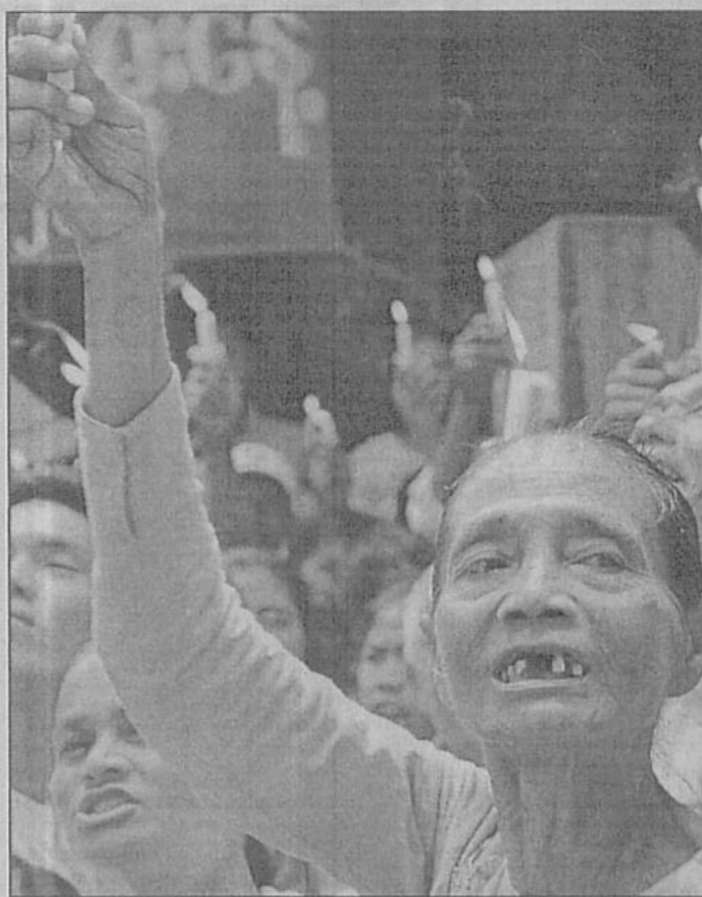
"Human rights are an inherently sensitive topic. But that does not mean they are inherently intrusive, or antithetical to state interests. Nor should we accept the widely parroted notion that there is a built-in tension, or a necessary trade-off, between freedom and security."

The Council will seek to avoid a charge levelled at the 53-nation Commission that it was selective in the cases it treated, by carrying out systematic human rights reviews for each of the UN's 191 member states.

Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the new Council was "uniquely positioned to redress the shortcomings of the past."

"It is empowered to devise the means that will prevent abuses, protect the most vulnerable, and expose perpetrators," she told the session.

The Council, however, is already beset by criticism and lacks the support of the United States.



An elderly member of Myanmar National League for Democracy (NLD) shouts slogans for release of detained democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi in Yangon. Suu Kyi turned 61 yesterday, alone and under house arrest.

## Sri Lanka invites Tigers to talks

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka Monday invited Tamil Tiger rebels to negotiate peace and save their collapsing ceasefire as two more soldiers were reported killed in a weekend of violence that left over 50 people dead.

Defence officials said security forces Monday found the bodies of two soldiers shot dead by Tamil Tiger guerrillas during an attack on Sunday night in the eastern region of Welioya.

Diplomatic sources close to the Norwegian-backed peace process, meanwhile, said Oslo was expecting a response from the Tigers by Tuesday to a request seeking their re-commitment to the truce.

Norway's top peace envoy Erik Solheim asked both Colombo and

the Tigers to re-confirm their willingness to continue with the initiative after failing to arrange a face-to-face meeting between the parties 11 days ago in Oslo.

The government's Peace Secretariat, which coordinates with the Norwegians, Monday urged the Tigers to return to the table, either directly or through Oslo's peace facilitator.

"It also urges the LTTE to commit itself to an inclusive peace process that involves all other legitimate stakeholders and contribute towards the formulation of a truly progressive and democratic consensus that would ensure to the Tamil, Muslim and Sinhala ... a just and a durable peace," a government statement said.

## Two burnt to death in Indian riots

AFP, Lucknow

Two girls were burnt to death in sectarian rioting between Hindus and Muslims sparked by the death of a youth in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, police said Monday.

"Over 100 houses were set ablaze in a Hindu-Muslim clash in which two girls were charred to death," Prem Prakash, a police official told AFP.

The incident in Pratappgarh, 200 kilometres (136 miles) southeast of the state capital Lucknow, came after a Hindu youth was gunned down by unidentified people in a village market Sunday evening.

"The murder triggered a communal flare up when Hindus armed with rods and sticks torched houses of Muslims," Prakash said.

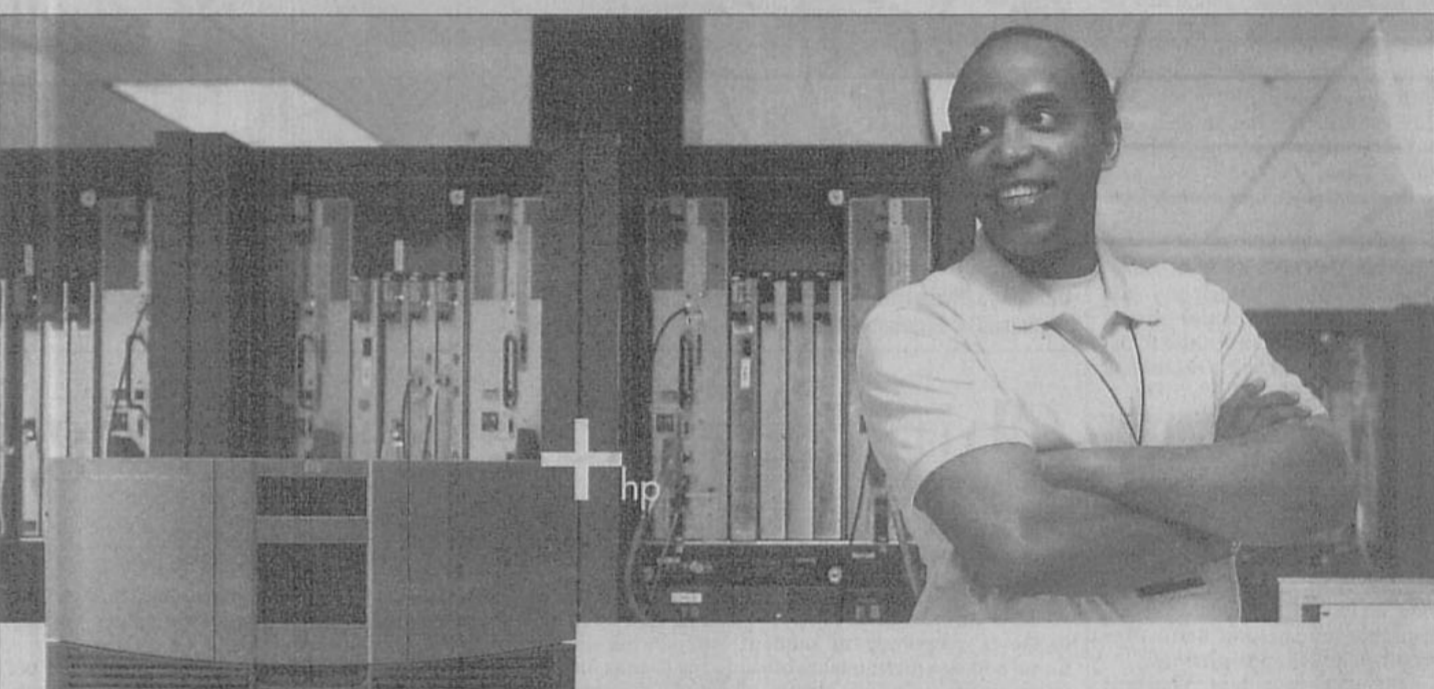
"Riot police have been sent to the village to control the situation," he said. "Over 100 people have been arrested. The situation is still tense."

Some 13 percent of Uttar Pradesh's 166 million population are Muslims.

Instances of sectarian clashes between Hindus and Muslims are not uncommon in the state where right-wing Hindus razed a mosque at a site disputed between the two communities in 1992.

The demolition sparked off some of the worst religious violence in the country, leaving at least 2,000 people dead.

Last month, three people were killed in sectarian violence in the Muslim dominated city of Allahabad while another four were killed in Lucknow in a separate incident.



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