



HAPPY MUD DAY: Nicholas Smith of Eastpointe, Michigan keeps an eye on his sister Abby Burkel while she plays in the mud at Wayne County's annual Mud Day in Westland, Michigan on Tuesday. The event consists of hundreds of children playing in a giant mud puddle made by combining 200 tons of topsoil with 20,000 gallons of water.

UK rules out amnesty for illegal immigrants

AFP, London

The British government announced Wednesday it had ruled out the possibility of an amnesty for immigrants who are in the kingdom illegally, in a review of immigration procedures.

Immigration Minister Liam Byrne said the Home Office would bring forward new proposals for "fair but tough" enforcement of the rules within a fortnight.

Tough-talking new Home Secretary John Reid announced a "fundamental overhaul" of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) within weeks of taking over the post in May.

He declared the IND "not fit" to deal with the problems facing it and there was speculation that ministers were considering an amnesty to ease the burden of the hundreds of thousands-strong backlog of cases.

But Byrne announced Wednesday: "Having almost completed our review of the IND, we can say that we will be ruling out an amnesty and will be instead bringing forward plans over the next two weeks for fair but tough enforcement of the rules.

"We'll not only strengthen our people but the tools they have to do the job."

The government estimates that Britain harbours between 310,000 and 570,000 illegal immigrants and it could take 10 years to deport them.

Asylum and immigration is a hot topic in Britain, with some newspapers regularly branding the system "chaotic".

The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants pressure group urged the government to grant the right to stay to illegal immigrants who have

been in Britain for two years.

"It's a political reality that around half a million irregular migrants can't readily be deported and European Union migration alone cannot be relied on to fill the jobs many of them are doing," said chief executive Habib Rahman.

"It's time to get real, put this beyond politics and start talking practical solutions.

"In the end a system that denies full rights to all migrants in the UK is both socially unjust and is creating losers all round.

"It makes life difficult for business, workers and for any government."

A poll published last week showed that more than seven out of 10 Britons would be opposed to an amnesty for illegal immigrants -- and the majority believed immigration had changed Britain for the worse.

US promises to respect Geneva Conventions

AFP, Washington

The US administration announced Tuesday that it will respect the rights of "war on terror" detainees, but urged Congress to pass legislation making it possible to prosecute Al-Qaeda operatives and other presumed terrorists being held at Guantanamo Bay.

In a policy reversal, the Pentagon on Tuesday released a memo directing Defense Department staff and brass to strictly adhere to the Geneva Conventions in handling foreign detainees.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England instructed US military leadership in the memo "to promptly review all relevant directives, regulations, policies, practices and procedures under your purview to ensure that they comply with the standards of Common Article Three" of the Geneva Conventions.

"You will ensure that all (Department of Defense) personnel adhere to these standards," said the July 7 directive.

Joanne Mariner, terrorism and

counterterrorism director at Human Rights Watch, said the Pentagon's decision to apply the Geneva rules to anyone captured on the battlefield "is welcome news for soldiers around the world."

The policy shift comes after the George W. Bush administration for months had maintained that the Geneva Conventions did not apply to combatant fighting for the Taliban, al-Qaeda and other terror groups.

But the unexpected change comes as Bush prepares to attend this week's Group of Eight summit of leading world powers in Saint Petersburg, Russia, where several otherwise staunch US allies take exception to Washington's treatment of terror suspects.

The change was prompted by a Supreme Court ruling late last month rejecting the Bush administration's plans to impanel special military tribunals to try the terror suspects. The high court ruled that such panels were a violation of international and domestic law.

The US administration, meanwhile, insisted that it all along has respected the human rights of detainees at Guantanamo Bay.

Vanuatu is happiest country on earth

AFP, London

The tiny South Pacific Ocean archipelago of Vanuatu is the happiest country on Earth, according to a study published Wednesday measuring people's wellbeing and their impact on the environment.

Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica and Panama complete the top five in the Happy Planet Index, compiled by the British think-tank New Economics Foundation (NEF).

The index combines life satisfaction, life expectancy and environmental footprint -- the amount of land required to sustain the population and absorb its energy consumption.

Zimbabwe came bottom of the 178 countries ranked, below second-worst performer Swaziland, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ukraine.

The Group of Eight industrial powers meet in Saint Petersburg this weekend but have not much to smile about, according to the index.

Italy came out best in 66th place, ahead of Germany (81), Japan (95), Britain (108), Canada (111), France (129), the United States (150) and Russia, in lowly 172nd place.

Cloned son of a showjumper



AFP file photo of prizewinning showjumper E.T.

AFP, Paris

Gene scientists on Wednesday announced the birth of a cloned horse -- son of a prizewinning showjumper -- who they hope will pass down the genes of his sire to future generations of champions.

The foal, named E.T., Cryozootech-Stallion, was born on June 2 at College Station in the US state of Texas, the French laboratory Cryozootech said in a statement. He is in good health, Cryozootech founder Eric Palmer told AFP by telephone.

The foal's sire, E.T., a 20-year-old stallion who has won two world showjumping cups, was castrated at age three as is common practice for jumpers, and was therefore incapable of reproducing normally.

In cooperation with E.T.'s Austrian jockey Hugo Simon, scientists performed a biopsy on the stallion in 2003, removing cells which were then kept frozen in liquid nitrogen at minus 196 degrees Celsius (minus 320 Fahrenheit).

As a genetically identical copy of his sire, the cloned foal will be used exclusively for breeding purposes from age three onwards, said Cryozootech.

Asians increasingly at risk of blasts

AFP, Singapore

From Bali to Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Mumbai, Asian civilians are increasingly at risk of dying in bombings by militants, analysts said Wednesday.

"Actually there has been a very significant shift in the terrorist strategy," said Kusnanto Anggoro, researcher at Jakarta's Centre for Strategic and International Studies. "They are focused instead on the civilian targets."

In Asia's latest deadly attack, seven bombs exploded in trains and stations in the Indian financial capital Mumbai Tuesday night, killing at least 183 people and wounding more than 600 others.

"I'd say that there's certainly more focus on civilian targets since 9/11," said Clive Williams, a professor at the

Australian Defence Force Academy.

He was referring to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States which killed about 3,000 people and for which Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility in the Mumbai blasts, the latest of many to hit the city over the past 13 years. Police have blamed most of the previous attacks on Muslim underground figures or Kashmiri separatists.

The list of Asian countries where civilians have either been deliberately targeted or killed as bystanders in recent years is long and includes Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, the Philippines, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In Sri Lanka last month, authorities blamed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam for a landmine explo-

sion that ripped through a bus, killing 64 passengers and injuring 39 in one of the country's deadliest attacks on civilians. The Tigers denied involvement.

The world's worst terrorist attack since 9/11 occurred on the Indonesian resort island of Bali in October 2002 when Islamic militants targeting Westerners killed 202 people. Militants killed another 20 civilians in renewed bombings last October in Bali.

"The most favoured tactic of the terrorist group is to bomb," said Rohan Gunaratna, head of terrorism research at the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University.

Williams, the Australian terrorism expert, said that before the Al-Qaeda attacks on the United States,

international militancy was often related to the Israeli-Palestinian issue with, for example, attacks on synagogues.

Anggoro in Jakarta said "first-generation terrorists" were linked to territorial-based nationalist movements. Like the Palestinian Liberation Organization, they depended on public support and preferred military targets.

The current "third-generation" are different, he said.

"They are basically unable to confront the security apparatus face-to-face" and have turned to easier-to-hit civilian targets, Anggoro said.

"It's becoming more difficult of course for the security apparatus to protect the civilian targets" such as trains, he said.

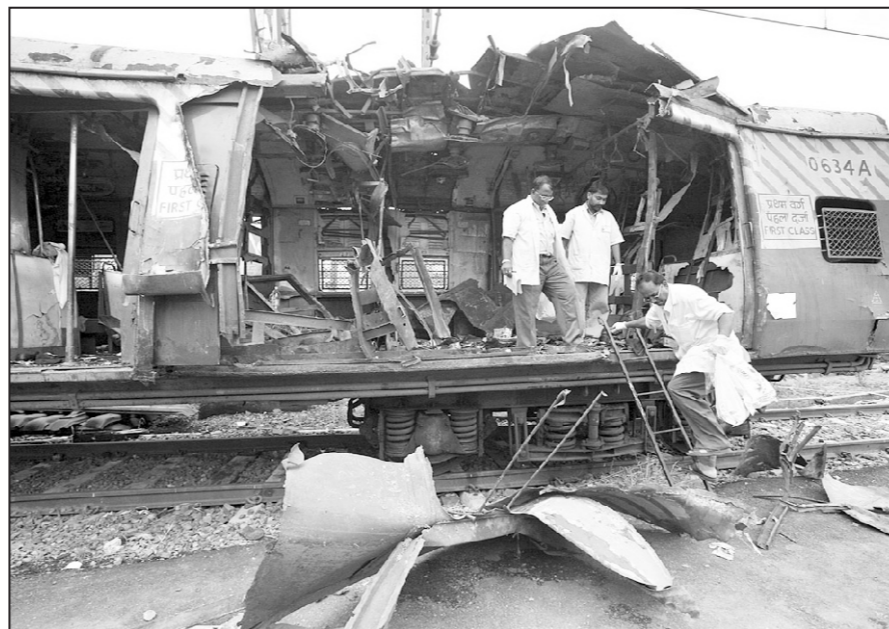
Williams said that while the

attackers' aim is generally to destabilize governments or provoke a change in policy, a variety of local factors are at play.

Abdul Razak Baginda, executive director of the private Malaysian Strategic Research Centre, said attackers fall into three different categories but it is not clear that civilians are increasingly being targeted.

Militants in Kashmir or southern Thailand are focused on specific separatist issues, he said. Both security forces and civilians have been victims there. A second Al-Qaeda-style group are anti-Western and conduct Bali-type attacks, he said, but a third group -- including pirates and the Philippines' Abu Sayyaf group -- are more like ordinary criminals, Baginda said.

AFTER THE MUMBAI TRAIN BOMBINGS



Series of train bombings killed at least 183 in Mumbai on Tuesday. Photos show from left (clockwise): 1. Indian forensic experts collect samples from a damaged coach at the site of a bomb blast at Kandivli. 2. A family friend forces a griefed wife of a blast victim to drink water as she breaks down on hearing news about her husband outside a city hospital in Mumbai. 3. Indian police women check train passengers at a railway station in New Delhi and 4. Pakistani security officials search the luggage of waiting passengers at the Pindi railway station in Rawalpindi. Pakistan placed security forces on high alert at railway stations, airports and embassies after the deadly blasts in Mumbai.

Mumbai blasts put fresh pressure on Musharraf

AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf will face renewed pressure to tackle extremism amid reports that India is probing links between Pakistan-based Kashmiri militants and the Mumbai train bombings, analysts say.

Musharraf was one of the first world leaders to condemn the "despicable" coordinated blasts in neighbouring India's financial capital on Tuesday night that killed at least 183 people.

Since 2002 the military ruler has led a major crackdown on Islamic extremists -- many of whom once enjoyed the covert support of the Pakistani establishment and intelligence services.

But while his efforts have been praised by the United States, which regards him as a key ally in the "war on terror", Musharraf still faces accusations that many militant outfits in Pakistan are still active.

"Pakistan has been trying seriously to put pressure on militant

groups. It has launched crackdowns against them, banned them, put their leaders behind the bars," political analyst Talat Masood told AFP.

"But it has not been able to wipe them out."

Some headline Pakistani outfits have benefited from their aid-giving role after last year's gigantic Kashmir earthquake, which killed nearly 75,000 people and left 3.5 million homeless.

Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, two of the main groups fighting Indian rule in divided Kashmir, "have revived a lot, because they were allowed to help the victims of the Kashmir earthquake in October last year," Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid said.

"That has given them a new kind of credibility, a new face as a kind of humanitarian organization," he told the British Broadcasting Corporation on Wednesday.

Lashkar on Wednesday denied any involvement in the Mumbai

blasts following Indian newspaper reports that police were probing its links with an Indian Islamic student movement.

The two groups have been prime targets since Musharraf launched his anti-militant drive in the wake of an attack on the Indian parliament which brought the South Asian rivals to the brink of a fourth war in 2002.

India accuses Pakistan of aiding and abetting a bloody 17-year Islamic insurgency in its sector of Kashmir, initially using "jihadi" fighters in need of a cause in 1989 after helping Afghanistan repel the Soviet invasion.

Pakistan has denied the charge, while at the same time saying that it has stopped independent extremists infiltrating Indian Kashmir across the heavily-militarised "Line of Control".

It also claims to have captured or killed more than 700 Al-Qaeda operatives, including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the self-proclaimed architect of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

'Big power' behind train bombings

Says Indian anti-terror chief

AFP, Mumbai

The head of the anti-terrorist squad investigating Mumbai's train bombings said Wednesday a "big power" was behind the well-coordinated operation that killed at least 183 people in India's financial capital.

"It was a well-coordinated and well-planned operation and it seems some big power is behind all this," the police anti-terrorism squad chief K.P. Raghuvanshi told Headlines Today television channel.

The anti-terrorist force has taken over the inquiry and visited addresses across the city Wednesday but had not yet arrested anyone, a senior officer told AFP.

Forensic experts were examining timers found near the scene of the seven blasts, six of them in first-class compartments, that happened little more than 10 minutes apart.

The wreckage of the six carriages was taken to a railway shed where bomb squad officers continued to search them for clues, according to a railway official.

"It seems pencil timers, which

are actually mercury fulminators, were used to carry out the blasts one after the other," a top official from Maharashtra state's home department told AFP. Mumbai is the state capital.

"We have collected some vital clues in this regard and the Central Forensic Laboratory has been requested to examine them without any delay," he added, on condition of anonymity.

Police said high-grade explosive material was used in the seven blasts during the evening rush hour Tuesday. Tests were being carried out but officers suspected the use of RDX or plastic explosives because of the power of the explosions.

Senior Mumbai police officer Arup Patnaik said he believed an eighth unexploded device had been found and added that anti-terrorist officers were now investigating. "I believe they have got some leads," he said.

Concern mounts over Koirala's health

AFP, Kathmandu

Concern mounted Wednesday over the health of Nepal's elderly and frail premier as he battled ill health that has led some politicians and analysts to say he should quit or name a temporary stand-in.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, 85, was discharged Wednesday after nine days in hospital with pneumonia, but one of his doctors said he had still not fully recovered.

"Though his treatment has not

been completed, he can be medicated in his residence," said Madhu Ghimire.

Koirala was admitted to hospital on July 3, but has had respiratory problems for more than a year and recently gave up a lifelong smoking habit on doctors' advice.

During a recent trip to Bangkok, he received laser prostate treatment but it was never made clear how serious this condition was.

Koirala, a popular political figure who has served as premier several times before, took over the reins in

late April after mass public protests forced King Gyanendra to give up absolute rule of the Himalayan kingdom.

But now some Nepalese leaders say Koirala's bad health is hampering efforts to put the country back on track.

"The government has many tasks to accomplish but they remain unfinished due to the prime minister's ill-health," Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the second largest party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified

Marxist-Leninist), told AFP.

Analysts said Koirala's illness and inability to fulfil his prime ministerial duties could affect the progress of a vital peace process with Maoist rebels that has been slow in getting off the ground.

The Maoists, fighting since 1996 for a "people's republic," agreed with the government last month to draft an interim constitution, paving the way for a power-sharing administration that would include the rebels. The two sides have already declared a ceasefire.

