



Residents look from behind the barricaded site of the triple bomb explosion after Juma prayers at the Nurani Mosque at Malegaon in the western Indian state of Maharashtra yesterday. Some 31 people were killed and 50 injured when three bombs exploded as hundreds of Muslims poured out of a mosque in western India. The Mosque was packed with devotees gathered for Shab-e-Barat, when Muslims traditionally pray for their ancestors.

## India wrestles with new terror attack

AFP, New Delhi

A deadly triple bombing targeting Muslims in western India has served as grim reminder of India's festering terrorism problem with analysts saying violence is spreading across the nation.

Thirty-one people were killed and 300 hurt when bombs exploded near a mosque in Malegaon in Maharashtra state Friday as Muslims prepared for the festival of Shab-e-Barat, or the Night of Blessing, when they pray for the dead.

"It just keeps getting worse," said the Times of India above a picture of a blood-stained Muslim man, his hand resting on the forehead of a wounded companion in hospital.

"There's a far greater dispersal of attacks than before," said Ajai Sahni, an intelligence analyst who tracks terrorist groups in South Asia.

"Earlier you had a much higher number of total fatalities in terrorist attacks but they were all concentrated in (insurgency-hit) Jammu and Kashmir. We find now these

attacks are being dispersed across the country," said Sahni.

There was no claim of responsibility for the Malegaon blasts, which came two months after explosions killed 187 rail commuters in India's financial hub Mumbai, north of Malegaon. Most of those victims were Hindus.

Investigators blamed those blasts on Islamic rebels opposed to New Delhi's rule in Kashmir but have made no major arrests.

The Mumbai attack came four months after at least 15 people were killed and 60 wounded in three explosions in the holy Hindu city of Varanasi.

Last October 66 people were killed when three blasts ripped through markets in the Indian capital New Delhi on the eve of a major Hindu festival.

"Earlier it was confined to Kashmir but now at no point can we say we're safe," said S. Chandrasekharan, analyst at India's South Asia Analysis Group.

Indian security forces have been

battling for 17 years to crush a separatist uprising in Indian Kashmir.

"Now there is fear across many parts of India that anything could happen which wasn't the case three or four years back," said Kanchan Lakshman, a research fellow at India's Institute for Conflict Management.

Analysts said it was too early to say who was to blame for the explosions in Malegaon, a mixed Hindu-Muslim town seen as a religious tinderbox.

But Sahni said it was unlikely to be any Hindu group.

"Given the degree of coordination required, I do not know of any Hindu organisation with these capacities," he said. "This is an unprecedented attack -- there have been minor incidents outside mosques but nothing so focused."

Whatever group was responsible was "out to exploit India's Hindu-Muslim fault lines" said Rahul Bedi, correspondent of Jane's Defence Weekly.

## Thai elections to be postponed, says PM

AFP, Bangkok

Elections slated for next month in Thailand will be postponed, Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said yesterday, confirming a delay in polls intended to end months of political deadlock.

"It's very likely the election must be postponed. (A delay) is expected because it will take time before the king endorses the new Election Commission," he said.

Senators late Friday selected five new commissioners in the first step towards a new vote.

But officials warned that the election body will not be ready in time and that the polls slated for October 15 will more likely take place at the end of the year.

Any pushback could tip Thailand into a political crisis threatened since last April's elections were invalidated.

Those polls were called three years early by Thaksin to quell demands that he quit.

# Tigers halt army advance into their territory

## 26 troops killed in fighting

AFP, Colombo

At least 26 troops were killed and over 125 wounded yesterday in new fighting as Tamil rebels resisted an army advance into guerrilla-held territory in northern Sri Lanka, military sources said.

Hundreds of Sri Lankan troops were involved in the offensive along the de facto border between government- and rebel-held areas in the Jaffna peninsula, said the sources on condition of anonymity.

The operation, launched from three locations along the front lines, sparked clashes with the rebels, the sources said, adding troops had moved almost a km into territory

previously held by the Tigers.

"There was heavy resistance initially," a military source said. "Casualties are mainly due to long-range weapons fired by the Tamil Tigers. The operation was launched to secure the army's forward defence lines."

There was no immediate word from the Tigers about the latest clashes or about any possible casualties on their side.

A new wave of fighting erupted in Jaffna last month when the Tamil Tigers staged a major artillery and mortar bomb attack against military positions within the peninsula, but most of the battles died down after two weeks.

Security forces were staging

the latest action to strengthen their defences and push back Tiger artillery guns that hit the main airbase in Jaffna, the sources said.

The fighting has also effectively cut off the only road access to the peninsula where about 8,000 civilians, including a large number of foreign nationals of Sri Lankan origin, are believed to be trapped.

The International Red Cross last month operated a ferry to evacuate 161 people, while the Sri Lankan navy Saturday sent a troop carrier to ferry some 795 civilians out of the peninsula.

"The navy undertook this humanitarian mission considering the plight of civilians in the Jaffna

peninsula who are faced with irregular transport facilities," the defence ministry said in a statement.

Nordic truce monitors ruled that the August 11 fighting in Jaffna was initiated by the Tigers, although the guerrillas said they were taking defensive action to prevent a military onslaught against them.

Sri Lanka has suffered an upsurge in bloodshed since December that has left more than 1,500 people dead by official count and a 2002 ceasefire in shreds.

The island's three-decade-old separatist ethnic conflict has claimed more than 60,000 lives.

## 'Syria to allow EU troops on Lebanese border'

AFP, Rome

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has agreed to allow European troops to enforce an embargo along the border between his country and Lebanon, Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said yesterday.

"The Syrian president has welcomed my proposal to send border guards from the European Union to control the passage of weapons between Syria and Lebanon," Prodi said in the southern Italian city of Bari.

These border guards "will not be armed and will not be in uniform but will have all the necessary equipment to control the passage of weapons toward southern Lebanon," said Prodi, who had spoken with the Syrian president by telephone several times "in the last few days".

The guards would number

"several hundred", according to Prodi.

The prime minister said he had informed the European Union's foreign policy chief Javier Solana and the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan of the plan.

"Our main European partners have received this proposal with great interest," he said, adding that he hoped the matter would be taken up by EU foreign ministers when they meet in Brussels next week.

Italy has already deployed armed forces in southern Lebanon, joining a bolstered multinational UN force currently commanded by France.

The force polices a truce which ended a month of Israeli military strikes against Hezbollah militants in the country and rocket attacks by the Shiite militia against Israel.

## Microbes can clean up toxic waste dumps, says scientist

REUTERS, Canberra

Microbes with a taste for toxic waste may hold the solution to cleaning up contaminated industrial sites and poisoned waterways across the globe, saving billions of dollars in cleanup bills, an Australian scientist said.

Microbes found in old waste sites in Australia not only tolerate lethal soil and water cocktails created by waste petroleum and chlorine, but can break them down so they no longer threaten humans, the scientist said on Friday.

"We have isolated bacteria which can live on those waste compounds," Megha Mallavarapu, from a government-backed environmental research centre based in South Australia state, told Reuters.

## Iraqi federalism row fans passions

### 13 dead, 11 corpses found

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki announced an important visit to Shia neighbour Iran on Saturday, as a debate over a plan to divide Iraq into autonomous regions fuelled sectarian tension at home.

Maliki is due in Tehran on Monday for his first official trip, described by his spokesman as a "cordial visit" that will focus on "security and political relations, besides developing and promoting bilateral relations."

Insurgents killed at least 13 people across Iraq yesterday, while police found the bodies of 11 men shot dead in apparent sectarian killings, security officials said.

The US military also announced that three of its soldiers were wounded in a bomb attack in Baghdad.

A string of explosions rocked the capital early Saturday killing at least four people and wounding dozens, security officials said.

Most of the attacks appeared to have targeted security forces, including a large car bomb in Zayuna that went off as a US patrol passed but killed only two Iraqi bystanders, interior ministry spokesman Brigadier Abdul Karim Khalaf said.

To the dismay of Maliki's US allies, Iran has become a major player in Iraqi politics since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, and the Shia premier must walk a tightrope if he is to keep friends in both Tehran and Washington.

Iranian refineries recently began refining more Iraqi crude in order to help end a crippling fuel crisis in Baghdad, and Maliki knows that Tehran could act either to restrain or to provoke Iraq's powerful Shia militias.

He will also hope to negotiate the safe release of six Iraqi soldiers and an interpreter detained on Thursday by Iranian forces after an incident at a border post.

# UNGA approves global plan to fight terrorism

REUTERS, United Nations

Israeli and Arab diplomats feuded bitterly on the UN General Assembly floor on Friday after the United Nations approved a largely symbolic global plan to combat terrorism three days before the fifth anniversary of the September 11 attacks.

The counter-terrorism "plan of action," approved by the 192-nation assembly without a formal vote, laid out eight pages of broad goals and measures to prevent terrorist acts, address the conditions that may foster terrorism and help nations build up their capabilities while respecting human rights.

But nine countries, mostly Arab nations, took the floor after its adoption to complain that it did not target Israeli military actions in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

Nor did it shield groups such as the Palestinians from being tagged as terrorists for pursuing "national liberation movements," the envoys said.

That prompted Israeli criticism of Iran and Syria for failing to crack

down on attacks against the Jewish state.

Adoption of the counter-terrorism strategy followed a year of wrangling over the plan's details after a world summit in New York directed the United Nations to prepare a plan.

The document glossed over some of the controversies that have plagued UN efforts to fight terrorism for years.

UN members thought they had figured out a way around one impasse when Secretary-General Kofi Annan suggested, in place of a formal definition of terrorism, a simple statement branding as terrorism any intentional maiming or killing of civilians, regardless of its motives.

While members agreed to the plan's adoption, the barbs began flying when delegates were given the chance to comment.

"It is an extremely sensitive subject, a very emotional issue, and rightly so," General Assembly President Jan Eliasson told reporters following the bitter exchanges.

"But since this is a global menace, we must have a global approach."

Annan, for his part, called it a "historic achievement" and urged nations to honour "the victims of terrorism everywhere by taking swift action to implement all aspects of the strategy."

Assembly resolutions are not binding under international law but are significant because they express the will of nations around the world.

The plan urges nations to crack down on terrorists' use of the Internet, adopt laws prohibiting incitement to commit a terrorist act, and grant asylum only after checking whether applicants have engaged in terrorist acts.

It also backs greater efforts to improve the security of national identity and travel documents, improved border and customs controls and better global coordination in planning for attacks with nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

## 'Nepal peace talks still on track despite delay'

AFP, Kathmandu

A fledgling peace process between Nepal's government and Maoist rebels is still on track, despite a near three-month gap in high-level talks, the deputy prime minister said.

Just one meeting between Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and rebel leader Prachanda was held in June when it was announced the seven-party interim government would be scrapped and a new one formed to include the rebels.

Since then no fresh date for talks has been set to get the ball rolling for the new power-sharing government supposed to steer the country through elections for a constitutional assembly that would rewrite the constitution.

"The talks between the government and the Maoists have not gained momentum as expected, but are nowhere near collapse," Deputy Prime Minister Amik Sherchan said.

The government was appointed after popular protests spearheaded by the parties and the Maoists in a loose alliance forced King Gyanendra to end 14 months of direct rule in April.

The slowness of the dialogue

process is "natural. It takes time because all the parties have different political backgrounds," said Pradeep Gyawali, a member of the government's negotiating team.

The seven parties in the government are still struggling to reach an accord on key political issues facing the impoverished Himalayan kingdom such as the future of the monarchy.

A draft interim constitution submitted in August sidestepped prickly issues like the role of the monarchy and how elections to the constituent assembly, that will rewrite Nepal's constitution, will be held.

The rebels who have waged a deadly 10-year-long "people's war" to install a communist republic now say they are willing to join the political mainstream.

The Maoists and the army have observed a ceasefire for the past four months.

But the rebels accuse the government of stalling over talks and say if key political issues are not addressed, they will call for mass protests in the capital.



Afghan men hold up pictures of the late leader of the Northern Alliance Ahmad Shah Massoud, during a ceremony held in commemoration of his assassination, in Kabul yesterday.

## Pak nuclear scientist has 'successful' operation

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's controversial nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan yesterday underwent "successful" surgery for prostate cancer at a leading hospital here, a doctor said.

A team carried out the three-and-a-half hour operation at the Agha Khan hospital in the port city of Karachi, said the doctor, who declined to be named.

"The operation is successful and Mr Khan is responding well," he said, adding that the scientist had been moved to his hospital room.

Strict security was in place at the private hospital.

Visitors were not allowed to see the 70-year-old scientist, who is revered in Pakistan as a national hero for helping to make the state an atomic power.

The government last month announced Khan was suffering from prostate cancer but said the disease was not at an advanced stage.



Photographs, notes, flowers and other mementos are displayed at a memorial for the victims of World Trade Centre terrorist attacks in Jersey City, New Jersey Friday. Americans will mark the fifth anniversary of the Sept 11 attacks that killed almost 3,000 people in New York City, Washington and Pennsylvania.

## US to mark 5th 9/11 anniversary with vigils, prayers

AFP, New York

With vigils and prayers, the United States is to pause in silent remembrance tomorrow to mark the horror of the September 11 attacks five years ago and pay tribute to the nearly 3,000 people who died.

Families and friends of those killed in the World Trade Centre in New York, at the Pentagon and on a flight that crashed in Pennsylvania are to be joined by dignitaries and ordinary Americans around the country to mark the events.

President George W. Bush has called for flags to be lowered to half mast and for people to observe a moment of silence at 8:46 am (1246 GMT), when the first passenger jet hijacked by al-Qaeda men ploughed into the Twin Towers.

"The events of September 11, 2001, will always be a defining moment in our history. We hold the victims and their families in our hearts, and we lift them up in our prayers," Bush said Thursday, ahead of the commemorations.

The president is to visit all three

sites, starting with a wreath-laying at Ground Zero Sunday before breakfasting Monday with rescuers and firefighters -- hailed as heroes after losing 343 of their comrades five years ago.

He is to observe the moment of silence in New York, where 2,749 people were killed, before attending a ceremony outside Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where a third jet crashed after passengers tackled their hijackers.

In the afternoon he is to attend a further ceremony at the Pentagon, where a fourth hijacked airliner crashed, killing 184 people.

And at 9 pm (0100 GMT Tuesday) Bush will deliver a national address from the White House.

Bush spokesman Tony Snow said the address will be "a non-political speech about what September 11th has meant to the nation" that will be "appropriately respectful of those who suffered losses, and optimistic about the strength of a society that can withstand such attacks."