

Amrozi admits helping build the bomb

Bali suspect wanted to kill 'as many Americans as possible'

AFP, Manila

The man being held by Indonesia for a role in the devastating Bali blast has admitted helping build the bomb, the chief Indonesian investigator said here yesterday.

The head of the Indonesian investigation team probing the attack, Major General I Made Mangku Pastika, said the suspect Amrozi had said he wanted to "kill as many Americans as possible" in the attack.

The massive October 12 blast ripped through a packed nightclub, killing more than 190 people, mostly Australians. Hundreds more were injured.

Pastika said the explosive device used in the bombing included ammonium nitrate, a chemical also used for making commercial fertiliser.

"He (Amrozi) bought it in Surabaya at a chemical store," he told reporters, adding that investigators had discovered the place where the terrorists had constructed the bomb, without elaborating.

"According to this suspect, he hates Americans. He wants to kill as many Americans as possible," Pastika said.

Pastika, who is in Manila to attend a regional anti-terrorism conference, also said Amrozi had admitted to having met Indonesian cleric Abu Bakar Bashir and Islamic terror suspect Riduan Isamuddin, better known as Hambali.

However, he did not say if the police have found any direct link between Bashir and Hambali and the bomb attack.

Pastika said that the authorities are looking for between five and nine other suspects, all Indonesians, in connection with the bombing. He said the police have their identities.

"They planned for two months, (it) started in early September," Pastika said.

He said Amrozi told police "they were not very happy because

Australians were killed," instead of Americans. The US government has said at least three Americans were among the dead.

The group who built the Bali bomb linked in Malaysia to plan the attack, Pastika said, adding that Malaysian and Indonesian currency were used to buy one of the vans used in the attack.

Singapore and Malaysia say Bashir is the spiritual leader of regional terror network Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), which is suspected of a possible role in the Bali blast. Hambali is the suspected operations chief of JI.

Indonesian police have declared Bashir a suspect in a series of church bombings on Christmas Eve 2000 and in a plot to assassinate Megawati Sukarnoputri before she became president.

Pastika said Amrozi met Bashir at an Islamic boarding school in Java about six months ago, when the cleric gave a speech at the school.

"He's (Amrozi) one of the men who learned about jihad from Bashir," Pastika said, referring to holy war.

Asked if the detained suspect is a member of JI, Pastika said: "He said he is free, but his ideological background is the teaching of Bashir."

Amrozi also told police he met several times with Hambali, but that Hambali is now out of Indonesia, Pastika said.

He said the suspect also told police he met with Hambali's supposed successor, but that he did not give his name. The successor was supposedly the man behind the Jakarta bombing that severely injured the Philippine ambassador to Indonesia two years ago.

Pastika also said that before his arrest, Amrozi apparently planned flee to the Indonesian city of Manado, before travelling to the southern Philippines island of Mindanao.

When police raided Amrozi's house they found "tickets to Manado," he added.



PHOTO: AFP

King Carl XVI Gustaf (R) of Sweden wears the traditional Mexican sombrero beside his wife Queen Silvia (L) during a visit to San Francisco el Tule, Oaxaca on Thursday. The royal couple were on the third and final day of their official visit to Mexico, their second in 20 years.

Bush hosts Ramadan dinner

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush reiterated his rejection of religious intolerance Thursday as he hosted ambassadors from the world's Islamic nations to dinner to mark Iftar, the first day of the holy Muslim holiday Ramadan.

"In hosting tonight's Iftar, I send a message to all the nations represented by their ambassadors here tonight: America treasures your friendship. America honors your faith," Bush told his guests.

"We share your belief in God's justice, and your insistence on man's moral responsibility," Bush said. "We thank the many Muslim nations who stand with us against terror. Nations that are often victims of terror, themselves."

The president reminded Americans that the United States is at war with terrorism, and not Islam.

"America rejects all forms of religious intolerance. America grieves with all the victims of religious bigotry. And America opposes all who commit evil in God's name," he said.

The White House dinner was also attended by Secretary of State Colin Powell, National Institute of Health Director Elias Zerhouni, and United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Hamad bin Zayed.

Turkish EU entry would be 'end of Europe'

REUTERS, Paris

The head of the European Union's Constitutional Convention was quoted yesterday as saying Turkey was not a European country and its entry into the EU would be "the end of Europe."

Former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, president of the Convention on the Future of Europe, told the newspaper Le Monde that those who backed its candidacy were "the adversaries of the European Union."

"Its capital is not in Europe, 95 per cent of its population live outside Europe, it is not a European country," he said. Asked what the effect of enlarging the EU to Turkey would be, he said: "In my opinion, it would be the end of Europe."



PHOTO: AFP

Police and security personnel shove a woman into a car following a brief protest in front of the Great Hall of the People in Beijing yesterday, prior to the start of the 16th Communist Party Congress.

Taiwan urges Beijing to recognise its 'existence'

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan yesterday urged Chinese leaders to recognise the existence of the island as a country, asking Beijing to cease its threats of military force.

"We urge mainland authorities to face the reality that the Republic of China exists," said Chen Ming-tong, vice chairman of the cabinet-level Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), using the official name of the island.

Chen then asked China "not to make excuses for refusing to renounce the use of force" against Taiwan. "It does not help improve cross-strait ties."

Chinese President Jiang Zemin, in a speech to open the Communist Party's 16th Congress, ruled out the use of force over Taiwan but said the threat was aimed at "foreign forces" seeking to interfere.

"Our position of never undertaking to renounce the use of force is not directed at our Taiwan compatri-

ots," Jiang told the more than 2,000 delegates assembled in Beijing for the crucial conference.

"It is aimed at the foreign forces' attempts to interfere in China's reunification and the Taiwan separatist forces' schemes for 'Taiwan independence'."

China has considered Taiwan part of its territory awaiting reunification since the two sides split in 1949 at the end of a civil war. It has since threatened to invade the island if it tries to declare independence.

Jiang, who is expected to begin stepping down from his leadership positions at the week-long party event, also urged the reopening of top-level talks, suspended for years amid icy bilateral ties.

"On the basis of the one-China principle, let us shelve for now certain political disputes and resume the cross-strait dialogue and negotiations as soon as possible," Jiang said.

In response, President Chen

Shui-bian said Taiwan would be "happy" to do so, Chen Ming-tong said. "We will be happy to talk with Beijing, provided that no precondition is set, to discuss any topics including the possibility of a 'future one China'," the MAC vice chairman quoted Chen as saying.

MAC declined comment on the Chinese leadership change expected at the congress.

"We hope the transition of power will be smooth and that the new leaders will deal with cross-strait relations with pragmatism and work towards a constructive cooperation relationship with Taiwan, which is mutually beneficial," MAC's Chen said.

Taiwan leaders have rejected the "one China, two systems" formula for reunification, which Jiang also repeated in the speech, insisting on the country's independent sovereignty.

Saramago launches new book

AFP, Lisbon

Portuguese author Jose Saramago, who says he spent much of 2001 suffering from writer's block, has published a new book in Portugal and Brazil which focuses on the theme of identity.

"I spent much of last year feeling uneasy because I did not have an idea for a book, not because I had to write one but because I felt like it," he told reporters here on the eve of publication.

"But in the middle of October my wife told me not to worry because I was becoming so unbearable an idea was certainly on its way," Saramago, whose last book was published in 2000, added. Called "O Homem Duplicado" or "The Duplicated Man" in English, the book chronicles the tale of a history teacher who becomes aware of the existence of another man who looks just like him while watching a video he rented.

Saramago said the idea for the title hit him as he looked at himself in the mirror last November while shaving at his home in the Canary Islands.

"As always is the case with me, once I have come up with a title I had to invent a story to match it," he said.

"Normally what happens with authors is that they write a book and then suffer horrors to come up with a title. I force the story to match the title whether it wants to or not," he added.

Saramago's publisher in Portugal, Caminho, plans to issue a first print run of 80,000 copies of the book -- a record for the nation of 10 million -- in order to mark the author's 80th birthday on November 16.

About 50,000 copies of the book will be put on sale in Brazil today while a translated version will go on sale in Spain in January.

An Italian translation is slated to hit bookstores next spring.

Tremor hits Taiwan

AFP, Taipei

An earthquake measuring 4.1 on the Richter scale hit Taiwan yesterday, seismologists said. There were no reports of casualties or damage.

The midmorning quake had its epicenter 4.6 kilometers south of Tsao-shan in the central Chiayi County, seismologists said. It originated 11.2 kilometers under the earth's crust.

US, British jets again bomb Iraqi defences

REUTERS, Washington

American and British warplanes bombed air defences in southern Iraq for the second straight day on Thursday in response to attempts to shoot down the jets policing a "no-fly" zone, the US military said.

The Western aircraft attacked an air defence operations center near al Kut, about 153 km southeast of the capital Baghdad and left the area safely, the US military's Central Command said in a statement.

The strike, which occurred around 2:20 pm local time in Iraq, followed attacks on Wednesday against two anti-aircraft missile sites near al Kut and a military air defence command post in Tallil in southern Iraq, according to the Central Command.

The number of incidents involving US and British air patrols over no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq has risen sharply in recent months as speculation has grown that the United States could launch an invasion to topple Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

The warplanes have now attacked Iraqi air defences in the zones 55 times this year. Forty-two of those attacks have come in the southern zone.

An Iraqi military spokesman, quoted by the official Iraqi News Agency (INA), had said earlier that Wednesday's attacks were against "civilian installations" in the provinces of Wassit and Dhi qar. Al Kut is in Wassit province.

Iraq does not recognize the zones, set up after the 1991 Gulf War to protect a Kurdish enclave in the north and Shiite Muslims in the south from attack by Saddam's military.

Iraq often accuses Western patrols of attacking civilian targets and killing innocent people. Washington and London deny the charge.

A Washington report adds: A dispute in Iraqi opposition ranks grew more bitter on Thursday when one group accused its rivals of serving the interests of Iraqi intelligence and trying to make money from the blood of Iraqis.

The Iraqi National Accord was

responding to criticisms, mainly by members of the rival Iraqi National Congress, of arrangements for a proposed opposition conference in Brussels this month.

Officials of the Iraqi National Congress say the Iraqi National Accord and its allies -- two Kurdish groups and a mainly Shi'ite Muslim group -- have tried to take most of the seats at the conference in what they call a grab for power.

The United States, which wants to oust Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, is trying to mediate in the dispute.

The Iraqi National Accord, a group formed mostly of former Iraqi military men and former members of the ruling Baath party, answered its critics on Thursday with a vitriolic attack.

"All the media accusations ... show clearly that the secret aims behind them go beyond the personal desires and interests of those who propagate them ... to provide a service to the Saddam regime's centers of intelligence terrorism."



PHOTO: AFP

Gallery director Edmund Capon adjusts Self Portrait, 1972 by Spanish artist Pablo Picasso before the opening of the "Picasso: The Last Decades" exhibition at the Art Gallery on New South Wales in Sydney yesterday. The spectacular collection, which will stay on display until February 16, 2003, features over 80 paintings, sketches and linographs from the period 1953-73 of the late master of contemporary art and sculpture.

Women drivers worse at parking than men in UK

REUTERS, London

Women drivers have greater problems with parking than men, according to an analysis of accident claims by a British insurance company.

The findings reported in the Times newspaper yesterday will do little to bring harmony in the perennial argument over which sex makes the best drivers.

A study of half a million claims at Admiral Insurance found that women were almost twice as likely as men to have a collision in a car park, 23 per cent more likely to hit a stationary car, and 15 per cent more likely to reverse into another vehicle.

But, before male drivers start congratulating themselves, the study also found that men have more serious accidents, made more costly insurance claims, and kill more pedestrians.