

Bali bomber to walk gallows *Applause, tears greet Bali bombing verdict*

AP, Bali

In the first verdict on last year's Bali bombings, an Indonesian court on Thursday convicted and sentenced to death Amrozi bin Nurhasyim for his role in the attack that killed 202 people.

Amrozi was found guilty of planning and helping execute the bombings - a verdict that could help end Indonesia's reputation as being soft on terrorists.

"The accused is found guilty in a legal and convincing manner of carrying out an act of terrorism," said judge I Made Karna.

After the verdict was read, Amrozi took off his Islamic skull cap, raised his arms and gave his lawyers the thumbs-up sign. Hundreds of people, including survivors of the bombings, cheered when the judge read the sentence.

As he was led out of the courtroom, Amrozi smiled broadly at Australian survivors, some of whom shouted back angrily. Australia lost 88 people in the attack.

The verdict came two days after another bomb exploded at the



PHOTO: AFP

Indonesian terror suspect Amrozi smiles at the dock during his verdict in Denpasar, Bali yesterday. Amrozi handed death sentence for the October 12 Bali bombings which killed 202 people, most of them Western holidaymakers.

Marriott Hotel in Jakarta, killing at least 10 people and wounding nearly 150. Both attacks have been linked with Jemaah Islamiyah, a shadowy al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group believed to be operating in Southeast Asia.

Indonesia's government has been eager to show the world that it is committed to bringing the perpetrators of the bombings to justice.

If the Amrozi verdict is followed by similar convictions for other alleged bombers, Indonesia's notoriously inefficient judicial system could get a much needed boost in its efforts to confront Islamic extremism.

Amrozi's was first of at least three dozen cases to come to trial. Three other defendants are currently facing the court in Denpasar, the capital of Bali island. At least 30 other suspects, apprehended after a massive manhunt, are expected to face justice in coming months.

Most of Bali's 3 million people are Hindu, unlike the rest of Indonesia's 207 million people who are predominantly Muslim. Several of the alleged bombers said they picked the venue to kill as many

Westerners as possible in order to avenge the treatment of Muslims in other parts of the world.

"The Balinese people will be rejoicing today," said Julia Ika Setiani, a university student who attended the trial. "My family and my friends have suffered because of this grisly bombing."

Amrozi, a 41-year-old mechanic from the island of Java, has been called the "smiling bomber" because of his lack of remorse and jocular manner after his arrest last year. During a peer's trial, he grinned and yelled out "Bomb!" when asked about Tuesday's explosion in Jakarta.

The judge said Amrozi has seven days to appeal his sentence, something his lawyers said they would do.

Although Indonesian law allows for death sentences to be handed down for crimes such as murder and terrorism, in practice executions are rare.

Maj. Gen. Made Pastika, who led the Bali investigation, told reporters Thursday that only six suspects in the Bali attacks remain on the loose.

killed in the blast at the Sari club.

She said the verdict had given her a sense of release.

"I got out my anger in the end which has been building up for a long time," she said.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard told reporters in Sydney that justice had been done.

"I hope that this verdict provides some sense of comfort to those who lost their loved ones in this tragedy," Howard said.

In Bali, some attending the trial planned to celebrate.

"We are going to party a fair bit tonight here and have a few drinks," said Australian Geoff Phillips, father of survivor Brad Phillips, who said his son lost seven friends in the blast.

Australian Jake Ryan, 22, who lost half a foot in the bombing, fought back tears and struggled for words. "It's been a long day," he told Reuters.

"I wouldn't mind going out and getting blind (drunk), hitting the gas," he said.

Dubbed the smiling bomber, Amrozi had giggled with delight when talking about the bombing, shocking and angering people around the world.

In Sydney, survivors and relatives of victims welcomed the verdict, but there was mixed reaction to the sentence of death.

"I believe it will make him a martyr," Australian Brian Deegan, who's son Josh was killed in Bali, told Reuters.

"There is going to be a lot of repeats of Tuesday night," he said, referring to a car bomb that killed at least 10 people at a hotel in the Indonesian capital Jakarta.

In Britain, Susanna Miller, whose brother Dan died in the bombing, also said she regretted the death sentence.

Suspected bombmaker blows himself up in Indonesia

AFP, Jakarta

A suspected bombmaker blew himself up yesterday as he built an explosive device in the troubled district of Poso in Central Sulawesi, Indonesian police said.

Police identified the victim as Bachtiar alias Manto, aged about 20.

"Our initial analysis from the evidence in the field is that he was making a bomb at the time and it exploded," provincial police spokesman Agus Sugianto told AFP.

Sugianto said Bachtiar was on the police wanted list in connection with a July 11 bombing that wounded three people at a Poso cafe. Bachtiar was also wanted in connection with the burning of a car in 2001.

The explosion, about 9 am, blew off Bachtiar's hands and severely damaged his eyes and chest.

Sugianto said. He died at the scene. "We can't yet determine if it was high or low explosive," he said.

Asia urged to focus on 'causes' to snub terror

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Asian governments cannot defeat terrorism through military means but needs political courage to address the root causes of the scourge, Malaysia said yesterday.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said the government was on the alert and would increase surveillance after Tuesday's deadly car bomb blast outside the JW Marriott Hotel in Jakarta which killed at least 10 people.

But he warned terrorism would continue to haunt the region and the world unless the root causes were removed.

"For how long can we continue to take precautions? If we relax one day, it will occur again. As long as the root causes of terrorism are not addressed, then we will continue to face these problems," he told reporters.

Asked if the US is to be blamed for the way it handles the Palestinian crisis which he has cited

as a key factor driving terrorism, he said he was not blaming them but "we think the US approach will not reduce the threat of terrorists."

Mahathir also hit back at critics over Malaysia's move to detain without trial some 70 suspected Islamic militants under a tough security law over the past two years.

"Everyone said Malaysia was cruel to arrest and detain people but now they know which is better, whether to allow bombs to explode first and then arrest people, or to arrest people before the bombs explode."

Separately, his deputy Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Jakarta explosion showed terrorism was not a problem which could be wiped out easily.

"We can make life very difficult for terrorist elements. We can scatter them, we can cut off one head here and one tentacle there, but often the beast survives," he was quoted as saying by Bernama news agency when opening a three-

day Asia-Pacific security conference here.

"It melts into the alleyways, the hills, the forests... but it mutates, then strikes again."

"This time it was Jakarta. Tomorrow or a month after or a year, it could be another place. No city, no island, no country is safe."

Abdullah, who will succeed Mahathir who retires end-October, said governments were not putting enough emphasis on intelligence-gathering about terrorist activities.

Malaysia has strengthened measures individually and in cooperation with other countries to deny terrorist funds, food and arms "but again, some of us need to do even more," he said.

The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter Terrorism, launched in Kuala Lumpur last month, could be the "focal point" for intensifying training and enforcement, he added.

Blast in Kashmir market: 2 killed

AFP, Srinagar

At least two Indian troops were killed and six injured Thursday when suspected Islamic rebels lobbed a grenade in the main market of Indian Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, police said.

The grenade was thrown at a small truck carrying troops from India's Border Security Force (BSF) in the Lal Chowk area, sparking panic in the city's main commercial hub, witnesses said.

Two BSF troops were killed and six others injured, police said.

It was the first blast in several months in Srinagar, regarded as the hub of the 14-year Islamic insurgency against India's rule in Kashmir. It came despite stepped-up security ahead of India's Independence Day on August 15, generally a day of tension in Indian Kashmir.

Witnesses said all shops were shut down in Lal Chowk shortly after the blast at 12:50 pm (0720 GMT), with suspects being brought before informants stationed in security vehicles.

"I heard a powerful blast and I immediately rushed out of my shop," said Imtiaz Ahmed, a shopkeeper in Lal Chowk. Other witnesses said they saw six vehicles damaged by the grenade.

Aid worker among 7 Afghans killed in Taliban raid

REUTERS, Kabul

Six Afghan soldiers and a driver for the US-based aid agency Mercy Corps were killed on Thursday in a raid by suspected guerrillas of the former Taliban regime in the troubled southern province of Helmand, police said.

Mohammad Ayoub, deputy police chief of Helmand province, told Reuters the attack came just before dawn on a remote district headquarters in Deshu, not far from the Pakistani border.

"Six army soldiers and a driver for Mercy Corps lost their lives in the incident, which happened after morning prayers."

He said the soldiers were killed in a gunbattle resisting the raid. He did not know if any of the attackers, whom he described as Taliban guerrillas, had been killed.

Rod Volway, head of the Mercy Corps office in the neighboring province of Kandahar, confirmed that a driver for the agency, Raz Mohammad, had been killed.



PHOTO: AFP

An unidentified Indian women look at paintings which are displayed as part of an exhibition made up of 150 contributions from juvenile inmates of Tihar Jail in New Delhi yesterday. The prison's administrators started the painting classes in a bid to occupy the time of the inmates who are between 18 to 21 years. The exhibition at a New Delhi Emporium will continue till August 12.

Uproar in Lok Sabha over 'secret' military files

AFP, New Delhi

The Indian parliament went into uproar Thursday over the government's refusal to release a "secret report" that purportedly highlights shady arms deals at the height of a near-war with nuclear rival Pakistan in 1999.

The 22-member Parliamentary Affairs Committee (PAC) told the house Wednesday it could not launch an independent probe into the case as the defence ministry, citing national security, had declined to release a report by India's Central Vigilance Commission, which investigates high-level corruption.

The controversy intensified when a private television channel claimed the report shows defence

ministry officials accepting bribes, inflating procurement costs of artillery guns, shells and bullet-proof jackets during the Kargil conflict four years ago.

On Thursday, the main opposition Congress party and several other opposition parties moved a slew of adjournment motions seeking suspension of all business until the issue is discussed.

"For the first time in the history of the Indian parliament the PAC has been denied key document files by the ministry of defence. It has led to a parliamentary deadlock and attack on parliamentary democracy," Congress chief whip Priyaranjan Dasmunshi said.

Manila to prosecute more soldiers

Arroyo wants maximum penalty for mutineers

AFP, Manila

Philippines authorities plan to prosecute dozens more rebel soldiers and civilian conspirators involved in an alleged coup attempt against President Gloria Arroyo, officials said yesterday.

Thirty-eight soldiers would be charged with rebellion in civilian courts, in addition to 321 colleagues indicted earlier for their brief takeover of a section of the Makati financial district on July 27, National Bureau of Investigation chief Reynaldo Wycoco said.

The mutiny swiftly fizzled out after failing to rally wider support, but the government maintains it was part of a larger plot allegedly led by opposition Senator Gregorio Honasan to unseat and possibly assassinate President Arroyo and replace her with a 15-member junta.

"Apparently when they (military authorities) conducted a headcount and processing of the (detained) soldiers, there were 38 others who were missed out (in the original

indictments)," Wycoco said on ABS-CBN television.

It brought the total of soldiers detained for the mutiny to 359.

Meanwhile, Philippine President Gloria Arroyo said Thursday she would push for the maximum penalty for rebel soldiers who carried out an alleged coup attempt against her government.

Arroyo said she was for "total justice based on due process" as officials said dozens more rebel soldiers and civilian conspirators involved in the plot would be prosecuted.

"The secondary aim of the mutineers if they did not succeed in toppling the government is to weaken national leadership," Arroyo said in a statement.

"We shall prove them wrong. We shall seek the maximum penalty for those who planned, led and executed this misadventure," she said.

Senior figures in the alleged plot could face life imprisonment if found guilty.

'Lanka peace talks likely to resume in Sept'

Tigers face US pressure for negotiation

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's stalled peace talks are expected to resume in September following a crucial internal meeting of Tamil Tiger rebels this week in Paris, the government's top negotiator said Thursday.

G. L. Peiris said the government presented a set of proposals to set up a provisional administrative structure granting political, administrative and financial authority to the LTTE.

The Tigers pulled out of the Norwegian-backed peace talks on April 21 after accusing the government of failing to deliver on promises made at six rounds of negotiations since September 2002.

The guerrillas have made the establishment of an interim council for war-ravaged areas a precondition for breaking the impasse in the process and resuming discussions aimed at ending three decades of ethnic bloodshed.

Peiris said there had been no formal response from the Tigers to the latest government offer, but that there were indications the guerrillas were studying the package with the

Japan. Official sources said the September talks were most likely to be in a European capital.

"There are so many who have offered us their capitals, and the venue will be decided after consultations with the LTTE. It is not an issue at all," Peiris told reporters.

On July 17, government formally presented a set of proposals to set up a provisional administrative structure granting political, administrative and financial authority to the LTTE.

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help of their legal and constitutional experts.

Meanwhile, the United States has asked Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels to renounce terrorism, stop political killings and resume peace talks with the Colombo government, the US embassy here said Thursday.

The embassy quoted state department spokesman Philip T. Reeker as saying they were concerned that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas were undermining peace prospects in the island.

The US designated the LTTE as a foreign terrorist organisation in October 1997 and further tightened screws on the Tigers after the events of September 11, although they were not linked to attacks in the United States.

The US embassy in its statement here said Washington was concerned that the Tigers were also not abiding by the Norwegian-brokered ceasefire which went into effect on February 23 last year.



PHOTO: AFP

Government employees of India's West Bengal state stage a mass demonstration at the state secretariat building in Kolkata yesterday. Protests occurred in the city as trade unionists vowed to fight a Supreme Court ruling that bans government employees from taking part in strikes.

Protests in India over SC ban on officials' strikes

AFP, Kolkata

Protests erupted in India Thursday as trade unionists vowed to fight a Supreme Court ruling that bans government employees from taking part in strikes.

Chitrabratho Mazumdar, general secretary of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), told AFP the group was launching marches and demonstrations in Calcutta and elsewhere in the state of West Bengal.

"Today we will take to the streets and make our disgust known. The Supreme Court order is an infringement on the people's movement and we will not stop our agitation till the court takes back its autocratic decision."

The CITU was planning a mass protest later Thursday in front of Calcutta's Writers Building which is the headquarters of the Marxist-led

West Bengal government.

The All-India State Government Employees' Federation (AISGEF) said the Supreme Court was going against the spirit of conventions backed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

"The right to bargain collectively and the right to strike is a fundamental right of the working class. The (1947) Industrial Disputes Act supported by the ILO has recognised and legalised the workers right to strike," said an AISGEF leader.

"So how can the Supreme Court stop government employees from striking?"

In the landmark ruling, India's Supreme Court on Wednesday said government employees had no right to strike because of the disruption it causes to other citizens and the economy.

The court was delivering its

judgement on petitions filed by government employees in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu who were challenging the provincial administration's power to sack them while on strike last month.

In an unprecedented move, the Tamil Nadu government sacked more than 100,000 employees who staged a strike on July 1 demanding higher wages.

Most of the employees were reinstated after a Supreme Court intervention but only after providing a written apology and pledging not to take part in strikes in the future.

Wednesday's Supreme Court ruling said "no political party or organisation can claim a right to paralyse the economic and industrial activities of a state or the nation or inconvenience the citizens."