



An Indian army soldier looks on as a Chetah helicopter takes off in Sonamarg yesterday as part of the search for the wreckage and missing pilots from two Indian Air Force Jaguar bombers crashed in bad weather on Friday. Wreckage of a Jaguar bomber was found close to Shutkar village in Kashmir while the search for the other jet is going on. Fate of the pilots was unknown.

US warns of potential attacks on train, buses

REUTERS, Washington

Bombs hidden in luggage could be used in a plot to attack buses and railways in major American cities this summer, US security authorities said on Friday.

"We assess that buses and railways could be targeted," the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security said in a bulletin issued to law enforcement agencies, local governments and the transportation industry.

"The plot calls for the use of improvised explosive devices possibly constructed of ammonium nitrate (fertilizer) and diesel fuel concealed in luggage and carry-on bags to include duffel bags and backpacks," according to the bulletin.

It said, "al-Qaeda and other groups have demonstrated the intent and capability to attack public transportation with conventional explosives, vehicle-borne bombs and suicide bombers."

Brian Roehrkasse said the bulletin was issued in light of recent events, such as the March 11 train bombings in Madrid, which killed 191 and injured 1,500.

He said officials believe the plot could target mass transit by using bombs concealed in bags, as they were in Madrid.

"In the past, bus bombings have been carried out in Greece, Israel and Turkey," according to the bulletin.

"Terrorist manuals provide instruction on producing a number of ammonium nitrate explosive mixtures" and such a bomb could be concealed in standard luggage, it stated.

The bulletin said anyone with any information about the possible bombing plot should contact the nearest FBI joint terrorism task force.

Homeland Security undersecretary Asa Hutchinson said the department had been in regular contact with the transit sector to share intelligence and make recommendations to boost security.

"So there is an increased law enforcement presence, there is increased public announcements (and) other security measures are being put in place," Hutchinson told reporters.

"Action has intensified in a common-sense way in response to what we have seen from intelligence and actions overseas," he said.

US Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton urged spending more than \$700 million to overcome security weaknesses in the US rail system.

"What happened in Madrid was a big wake-up call for a lot of people who may not have been focused on the need to improve rail security," Clinton, a New York Democrat, told reporters at New York's Pennsylvania Station.

Earlier on Friday in Spain, a bomb was found on a high-speed track. Spanish authorities said it may have contained the same type of explosives used in last month's Madrid train bombings.

The Department of Homeland Security said terminal parking lots should be checked for suspicious loitering, stolen or abandoned vehicles or vehicles left for long periods. Law enforcement vehicles should be parked near entrances and exits.

The agency said trash receptacles should be removed from passenger terminals, and recommended random passenger inspectors and security sweeps of stations.

The department also urged increased public safety announcements encouraging passengers to immediately report all suspicious activity or items to law enforcement authorities.

"Safeguard uniforms, patches, badges, ID cards and other forms of official identification as terrorists may exploit such items to gain easier access to public areas or other areas not normally accessible by the general public," it warned.

Spain confirms matchup of bomb materials

26-pound explosives found on Madrid rail track

AP, Madrid

A bomb found under a train track was made of the same type of explosives used in last month's Madrid terror bombings, Interior Minister Angel Acebes said yesterday, as train service was restored on the high-speed rail line.

Investigators have said the March 11 bombings were carried out with Spanish dynamite Goma 2 Eco. The attack killed 191 people and injured 1,800.

On Friday morning, authorities immediately stopped six bullet trains using the Madrid-Seville line after the discovery of the 26-pound bomb under a track about 40 miles south of Madrid. The bomb failed to detonate because it wasn't properly connected, officials said.

No train was near the site when the bomb was discovered, state rail officials said. But about 1,600 passengers left their trains and were taken to their destinations by charter buses. Train service was restored yesterday.

"The explosives (found Friday) are the same as those used on March 11, but at this moment the investigation is continuing... to try to determine who is behind it," Acebes told reporters, confirming an initial analysis.

Also Saturday, the Spanish newspaper El Mundo reported that the Spanish Embassy in Egypt received a letter from an Islamic militant group threatening new attacks if Spain doesn't withdraw its troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the letter, The Brigade of Abu Hafs al-Masri, a group that also claimed responsibility for the March 11 attacks, threatened to strike against Spanish diplomatic missions in North Africa and the Mediterranean region unless Spanish troops are withdrawn in four weeks.

A Spanish diplomat in Cairo, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed that the embassy received a threatening letter signed

by Abu Hafs after the commuter train attacks last month.

The United States believes the Abu Hafs group lacks credibility and has only tenuous ties to al-Qaeda. In the past, the group has claimed responsibility for events to which they were not connected such as last summer's blackouts in North

The discovery of the bomb on Friday rattled a country still traumatized by the March 11 attacks in Madrid, which officials believe may have been carried out by an Islamic extremist group from Morocco. Authorities on Friday stepped up security on Spain's entire rail network and used soldiers to provide surveillance.

Judge Teresa Palacio, a magistrate at the National Court, said Friday there was no evidence pointing to either the armed Basque separatist group ETA or the al-Qaeda terror network in the failed attack. ETA has targeted Spanish rail lines in the past.

Powell admits his Iraq intelligence flawed

REUTERS, Washington

US Secretary of State Colin Powell has acknowledged that the "most dramatic" part of his presentation to the United Nations making the case for war on Iraq was based on flawed intelligence.

Powell also said he hoped a commission investigating the US intelligence on Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction would reveal how the CIA ended up depending on unreliable sources for key evidence he used to argue for war.

The acknowledgement about alleged mobile chemical arms laboratories could further hurt the credibility of the Bush administration, also under fire in an election year for failing to stop the September 11 attacks.

The United States justified its first preemptive war by accusing Iraq of amassing illegal arms and invaded last year without explicit UN approval and over the objections of many allies.

In February, 2003, Powell made a major presentation of the US case against Iraq at a special session of the UN Security Council, where he

said the United States had several sources showing mobile chemical weapons laboratories.

But on Friday, the top American diplomat said the evidence on the trailers has been shown to be shaky.

"Now it appears not to be the case that it was that solid. But at the time I was preparing that presentation it was presented to me as solid," Powell told reporters on a flight home from a trip to Europe.

While doubts about the US sources of evidence for the laboratories have been raised for over a year, Powell's remarks were the most straightforward acknowledgement from the Bush administration that the information was probably wrong.

"That was the most dramatic of them (pieces of evidence) and I made sure it was multi-sourced," he said. "Now if the sources fell apart, then we need to find out how we've gotten ourselves in that position."

"I hope (the commission) will look into these matters to see whether or not the intelligence agency had a basis for the confidence that they placed in the intelligence at that time," he said.

Tagore heist: The gardener did it?

PTI, Kolkata

A former part-time employee of Visva-Bharati University has been arrested for the theft of Rabindranath Tagore's memorabilia after his fingerprints matched those found at the site of crime in the Rabindra Bhavan in Santiniketan.

Pradeep Bauri, 27, former contract gardener at the university, was detained from neighbouring Bolpur area on March 29 along with some other suspects and investigations showed his finger and palm prints matched with those found around the place from where Tagore's Nobel medal and other memorabilia were stolen more than a week ago, CID Additional DG R K Mahanti told reporters here yesterday.

Bauri has been handed over to CBI for further investigation, he said.

Mahanti said though Bauri confessed his crime initially and was beginning to divulge details about his aides, he retracted his statement after getting a legal opinion from his counsels.

Megawati inks rules to delay vote in some areas

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesia's President Megawati Sukarnoputri late Friday signed a regulation to delay voting in districts where ballot papers and other supplies have not arrived in time for Monday's general elections.

The voting is expected to take place on schedule throughout most of the vast archipelago.

But top security minister Hari Sabarno told reporters the distribution of electoral material was still a concern in the three easternmost provinces of Papua, West Irian Jaya, and East Nusa Tenggara.

He said the new regulation simply provided a legal umbrella in case a delay was needed.

"Whether or not the legal umbrella is used depends greatly on the situation," Sabarno said.

Newspapers quoted Ferry Kareth, head of the Papua General Elections Commission, as saying he had asked to delay the vote in about half the districts in the province which is home to many isolated tribespeople.

'Suu Kyi to be freed before May 17'

REUTERS, Bangkok

Myanmar democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi will be freed from house arrest and her National League for Democracy invited to a constitutional conference next month, Myanmar's foreign minister told NHH television yesterday.

"Original members who attended, including the NLD, will be invited," Foreign Minister Win Aung told Japan's NHK television in Bangkok, where he was due to meet his Thai counterpart. Asked if Suu Kyi would be released before the May 17 start of the conference, Win Aung said: "Yes." He added it was too early to give a precise date.

The military government, under pressure to show it is sincere about its "road map to democracy" announced with few details last August, set the date for the constitutional meeting last week.

But it made no mention of Suu Kyi, the Nobel peace laureate who remains under house arrest at her Yangon home, or her party, which has had its offices shut since clashes between opposition and government supporters a year ago.



Yangon faced calls last week from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, the United States and human rights groups to allow Suu Kyi and her party to participate in the conference.

The conference was suspended in 1996 after the NLD walked out, accusing the military of manipulating the process to stay in power. The NLD won general elections in 1990, but the government rejected the results.

There had been speculation Suu Kyi may be freed in mid-April following a recent visit to Yangon by UN special envoy Razali Ismail.

US slaps sanctions on Iran's nuke suppliers

REUTERS, Washington

The United States has imposed sanctions on 13 foreign companies in seven countries because of "credible information" that they sold equipment and technology to Iran that could be used in nuclear, biological or chemical weapons programmes, a State Department spokesman said on Friday.

The companies will be banned from exporting goods to US government agencies or receiving assistance from the United States and US firms will be barred from doing business with them for two years, spokesman Adam Ereli told reporters.

Ereli said the sanctions were being imposed under the Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000 and would be in effect until March 31, 2006.

A top US official last month accused Iran of concealing a nuclear weapons program and vowed to maintain international pressure on

Tehran to reveal its efforts.

The 13 companies include five Chinese companies, two in Macedonia, two in Russia and one each in North Korea, Taiwan, Belarus and the United Arab Emirates, Ereli said, noting the sanctions affected only the specific companies, not their respective governments or countries.

"The penalties were imposed... because there was credible information indicating that these companies had transferred to Iran, since January 1, 1999, either equipment and technology on the... multilateral export control lists" or items that could make a "material contribution" to weapons of mass destruction or cruise or ballistic missile systems, he said.

Ereli said the United States had imposed sanctions on a total of 23 entities since the law took effect, including four companies sanctioned last year.



Sri Lankan election officials tabulate counted ballot papers at a counting centre in Colombo yesterday. Official results available so far show President Chandrika Kumaratunga's party taking a comfortable lead as counting in Sri Lankan parliamentary elections got underway. Kumaratunga's Freedom Alliance got 1.23 million votes out of 2.75 million votes counted so far in the election which drew 10 million people voters, according to initial results released by the Elections Commission.

Iraqis inching towards sovereignty

AFP, Baghdad

US overseer Paul Bremer turned over control of Iraq's education ministry to interim Iraqi leaders yesterday as part of plans by the US-led coalition to restore national sovereignty by June 30.

The education ministry became the second government department to gain its independence from the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), which has ruled Iraq since toppling the former regime on April 9 last year.

On March 28, Bremer gave interim health minister Khidr Abbas the key to his ministry, one of the 25 that will make up the transitional Iraqi government set to take power in less than three months time.

"As we look to the construction of Iraq's future, no ministry, no part of the government is more important than the ministry of education," Bremer said at the handover ceremony here.

"In the new and free Iraq, no longer will education suffer as it did under Saddam (Hussein)'s tyranny," he said.

Iraq's interim education minister Alaaeddin Alwan said one of his priorities would be "restoring Iraqi education to at least reach the level of the 1980s."

To reach this goal the ministry will train a 290,000-strong teaching body in cooperation with the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations' children's fund (Unicef), he said.

Last week Alwan chaired a two-day symposium to prepare a new curriculum for Iraqi schools that he said would be fully reformed by 2007 and purged from ideologies imposed by the former ruling Baath party.

Echoing Alwan's message, about 40 schoolchildren from the Al Hariri school in Baghdad sang two songs glorifying Iraq, freedom and peace, at the ceremony.

All foreign visitors require fingerprints to enter US

Even nationals of closest allies not exempted

AFP, Washington

The United States said Friday it will require foreign visitors from virtually all countries -- including most of its closest allies -- to be fingerprinted and photographed on arrival.

The move, to take effect on September 30, will eliminate a special status enjoyed by citizens of 27 mainly European nations that had exempted them from enhanced US border security requirements which took effect in January.

Citizens of those countries -- participants in the so-called "visa waiver programme" -- will still be able to travel to the United States without a visa, but will have to meet the same requirements as visitors who require a visa.

Countries affected by the change are: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Britain, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

Special immigration procedures for citizens of Canada, who are not subject to the fingerprinting and photographing, and Mexico, remain unchanged.

The State Department and Department of Homeland Security announced the new rules, saying they were necessary to protect the country from terrorists and to ensure the viability of the visa waiver programme.

Nonetheless, the move is expected to draw heavy criticism, particularly from traditional and long-standing close US allies whose citizens will soon be fingerprinted and photographed on arrival at US air and sea ports.

Asa Hutchinson, the under secretary for borders and transportation security at the Department of Homeland Security, acknowledged there might be complaints but asked for understanding.

"We hope that the international community will understand our new system. This step is designated to make sure the security issues will be addressed. This will be a measure to identify terrorists," he told reporters.

Thousands pack Nepali streets after violence

AFP, Kathmandu

Thousands of anti-monarchy protesters burned tyres and threw stones at cars yesterday as they shut down Kathmandu in a strike to denounce clashes outside the king's palace that left 205 people injured.

Maoist rebels fighting to topple the monarchy offered moral support to the demonstrators, who marched Saturday from street corners across the capital chanting slogans demanding King Gyanendra restore democracy.

A coalition of nine Nepalese human rights groups said 201 demonstrators and four policemen were injured Friday as baton-wielding police dispersed protesters who tried to break down a barbed-wire barricade guarding the Narayanhiti Palace.

Riot police were deployed in force Saturday in Kathmandu's central government area, hoping to avoid another showdown in front of the palace.

Police said several vehicles that violated the strike were damaged including a passenger bus of the private domestic carrier Buddha Air.

Nhuchhe Maharajan, an activist with the five-party alliance organising the demonstrations, defended the stone-throwing, saying the strike was meant to "deplore the excessive police acts against peaceful protests."

The demonstrations outside the palace, which drew tens of thousands of people for two days straight, were among the largest by the five-party alliance whose months of rallies have failed to make an impact on the king.

The king, who is officially a constitutional monarch, in 2002 branded the elected government as "incompetent" and selected his own cabinet.



Nepalese riot police attempt to extinguish the fire from a pile of tyres burning on the street during a one-day general strike call by five political parties demanding restoration of multi-party democracy in Kathmandu yesterday. Shops downed their shutters and most traffic was off the roads in the Nepalese capital after protesters threw stones at several cars and motorcycles that broke the strike in the morning.