

Nations around world beef up security

AFP, Sydney

Nations around the world tightened security yesterday after a string of deadly bombings rocked London, attacks that Britain said bore the hallmarks of Muslim militant group al-Qaeda.

Wary governments in Europe, Asia and the Americas ordered increased patrols in subways, airports and rail stations in the wake of Thursday's blasts as leaders called emergency meetings to assess the possibility of more violence.

In London, jittery commuters went back to work with police standing guard at rail stations. British Home Secretary Charles Clarke said the bombers had to be caught before they could cause more destruction.

"The number one purpose today is to identify the perpetrators and arrest them" before they can carry out further attacks, he told BBC radio.

A group calling itself the Organisation of al-Qaeda Jihad in Europe, which claimed responsibility for the bombings, immediately threatened similar attacks in Denmark, Italy and other countries

with troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The level of alert has been raised in Italy as in all European countries," Italian Interior Minister Giuseppe Pisanu said Friday ahead of a meeting with army, police and intelligence chiefs in Rome.

France said Friday it would tighten border controls, especially its maritime frontier with Britain, after raising its anti-terror alert to red, the second-highest rating.

French Defence Minister Michele Alliot-Marie deployed military reinforcements to sensitive sites across the country, including train stations and airports.

In Spain, where 191 people were killed in a series of train bombings on March 11 last year claimed by al-Qaeda, Interior Minister Jose Antonio Alonso ordered the country into its highest anti-terror protection level.

Security forces patrolled communications centres, stadiums, shopping malls, power stations and water facilities.

In Athens, operators of the Greek capital's metro have jammed mobile phone networks as a security precaution, effective until Saturday, company sources said Friday.

Transport officials in Berlin raised their security alert to mid-level as German Interior Minister Otto Schily urged increased vigilance.

Meanwhile security was stepped up at British and US installations, including several British military bases in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Israeli officials immediately implemented a security clampdown at their embassy in London as Russian officials bolstered security in the Moscow metro system, which has been the target of several attacks in recent years.

Patrols in the Netherlands were heightened in and around ports that have sealinks to Britain, while increased security was also reported in other European nations including Belgium, the Czech Republic, Romania and Serbia.

In Australia, Prime Minister John Howard summoned his top counter-terrorism officials but said there were no plans to boost the national alert level, unchanged since the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

"The advice from our experts who met last night was not to alter the medium level of alert," said Howard, whose nation, like Britain,

has been a staunch ally in the US war in Iraq.

But extra police and security guards were deployed on public transport in Sydney and Melbourne while the police major-incident centre in Brisbane was placed on standby.

South Korea, another war ally, stepped up security around airports and public facilities and warned the 3,500 South Korean troops stationed in Iraq to maintain heightened vigilance.

Thailand reinforced the police presence at subway stations, bus stops and shopping centres, while insisting the country was safe from international terrorism while Singapore boosted security across its public transport network.

India ordered all states to continue a high alert around all security installations, religious buildings and public transport systems already in place since an attack Tuesday by militants on a disputed holy site in the northern town of Ayodhya.

But in Japan, a homeless man pointed up a security loophole when he broke into the British Embassy in Tokyo just hours after police stepped up security around it.

Londoners head back to work

Fear mixed with defiance



PHOTO: AFP
An Italian security personnel patrols the Vittorio Emanuele monument as tourists pass by yesterday. Countries in Europe, Asia and Americas tightened security after the deadly bombings in London, fearing more attacks in Europe.

AFP, London

Shaken but defiant, Londoners headed to work on trains and buses yesterday barely 24 hours after a wave of deadly bomb blasts tore through the city's public transport system, but many commuters also chose to stay away.

The London underground, closed after three separate explosions ripped through the network within minutes of each other, resumed partial service, although transport police said two of the lines hit by the blasts would remain closed all day. Buses were also running after the attacks that killed at least 37.

Police and rail staff stood guard in station entrances and along the web of passages that lead to the underground train platforms, offering a sense of security to commuters as they headed to work with the horror of Thursday's carnage — which also injured hundreds — still fresh in their minds.

The usual morning rush hour, however, failed to materialise with many people clearly electing to stay at home or to avoid public transport to get to the office.

"It's my first journey after the attacks. It's very good to get it over and done with," said Ian Hunt, a 48-year-old accountant who took an overground train to Liverpool Street,

where at least seven people were killed the previous day, before transferring to the underground.

"It feels just like a Sunday though because there are so few people," Hunt told AFP as he emerged from Tottenham Court Road station — usually a hive of commuter activity, but the crowds were much thinner than usual even at 8:00 am (0700 GMT).

The atmosphere at stations and on the underground trains was tense as passengers warily looked around themselves or buried their faces behind newspapers, emblazoned with shock headlines about the previous day's attacks.

Highlighting the tension, a sports bag left on the forecourt of Liverpool Street, a main London terminal on the edge of the financial district, sparked a brief scare after it was accidentally forgotten by its owner.

She sheepishly returned to claim it, apologising profusely to watching police, while some alarmed commuters shouted insults at her absent mindedness.

"I don't feel safe because of what happened," said Edyta Tziubi, a 25-year-old Polish assistant shop manager as she prepared to head for Paddington, on the western fringe of the city centre, from Liverpool Street station.



PHOTO: AFP
Flowers are placed on the fence outside Kings Cross station in London yesterday, a day after the terrorist bomb explosions on the subway train. The bombs that exploded on London underground trains were probably placed on the floor of the carriages and there is no indication that suicide bombers were responsible, British officials said yesterday.

Britons wonder if attacks are price of Iraq war

AFP, London

As Britain reels from the worst terrorist attack in its history, one question is forming itself in the minds of many people: how much, if it all, was the country's backing for the Iraq war to blame?

Despite widespread opposition at home, Prime Minister Tony Blair was the United States' staunchest ally during the March 2003 invasion to remove dictator Saddam Hussein.

British troops secured the south of the country around the city of Basra, where approximately 8,000 remain.

And while the country's casualties remain far below those suffered by the Americans, 89 British soldiers have died since the conflict began.

Blair's unflinching backing for US President George W. Bush over Iraq has been politically costly for the British prime minister.

He has had to endure a pair of damaging public inquiries into matters relating to the war, while the shatters reduced majority won by his Labour party in this May's election has been blamed in no small part on Iraq.

But some opponents say Blair's policies have also had a potential cost for the wider public in making Britain, particularly London, a prime target for Islamic terrorism.

While it is not known for certain who carried out Thursday's coordinated bombings in the British capital which left at least 37 dead and injured hundreds more, the government has made it clear what it thinks.

"We know that these people act in the name of Islam," Blair said.

His British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said later that the attacks bore "all the hallmarks of al-Qaeda," the Islamic group led by Osama bin Laden which carried out the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

"That is obviously the principle assumption on which the police and intelligence agencies are operating," Straw said.

Since the Iraq war, London has been bracing itself for a major attack.

TALIBAN SAY Britons pay price for rulers' deeds

REUTERS, Spin Boldak

A spokesman for Afghanistan's Taliban insurgents said yesterday the British people were paying the price for the evil of their rulers but the Taliban had nothing to do with Thursday's bomb attacks in London.

"The people of Britain are facing trouble only because of the evil deeds and oppression of their rulers," spokesman Abdul Latif Hakimi said by telephone from an undisclosed location.

Hakimi said the Taliban were neither sad nor happy about the four bombs on London's transport network that killed more than 50 people and wounded about 700.

"Had these blasts been directed at Britain's military targets or inflicted losses on the British government then we would have been very happy," he said.

Taliban fighters would attack British troops in Afghanistan but they were not involved in the London bombings, he said.

"We will take revenge on Britain in Afghanistan but, nevertheless, the Taliban have nothing to do with these blasts," he said.

S Asia leaders deplore London blasts

BBC ONLINE

South Asian leaders have condemned the attacks on London that killed at least 50 people and injured many others.

The leaders of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal have all sent messages of sympathy to the British government.

But the condemnation has not been unanimous. A prominent Pakistani politician suggested that the attacks could be a plot to denigrate Muslims.

He said the blasts could be intended to turn public opinion against Islam.

South Asian leaders deplored the attack in the strongest terms.

In a statement released through the foreign ministry, Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, said that the attacks underscored the fact that "terrorism is a global scourge" which has to be tackled by "concerted international action".

Singh, who is attending the G-8 summit in Scotland, said that global terrorism did not respect national boundaries, and that countries of the world needed to work together to fight it.

The Pakistani President, Pervez Musharraf, offered his condolences to Britain for the loss of life, and called for "a joint fight against terrorism".

"The people of Pakistan stand together with the people of United Kingdom in this very trying moment," the president said in a message released by the Pakistani foreign office to British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

"It is imperative that we stand together and further strengthen our bonds of cooperation to eliminate this menace," the president said.

But not all Pakistani politicians condemned the attacks.

A senior leader from a coalition of radical Islamic political parties, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) suggested that the attacks might have been orchestrated by the West as a strategy to turn public opinion against Muslims.

"This is very tragic," said Liaqat Baluch, a prominent lawmaker from MMA.

"But this could also be a strategy by Europe and America to line up against Muslims. They are directly saying that Muslim groups or al-Qaeda are behind these bombings. Then how can it be ruled out that these are not engineered blasts?" he asked.

Many Iraqis link London attacks to western policy in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Iraqis, who face suicide bombings on a daily basis, yesterday condemned the terrorist attacks in London saying they go against Islamic teachings, but many also blamed US and British policies for the rise in extremism worldwide.

"(US President George W.) Bush and (British Prime Minister Tony) Blair say Iraq is the battleground in the fight against terrorism, and they say they need to fight here to stop violence from spreading to their own homes," said Soad Moham-med, a 40-year-old teacher in a Sunni district of Baghdad.

"But it's precisely because of what they're doing in Iraq that they now face violence at home," she said.

"They are reaping the fruit of what they sowed," she added.

Khaled Yassin, a 30-year-old taxi driver, said: "Yesterday I was amazed when I got home from work to hear about bombings at the top of the news which, for once, weren't in Baghdad," adding that he even

Attack a matter of when, not if, for Italians

AFP, Rome

With Italy facing renewed threats of a terrorist attack in the wake of the London bombings, the government of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi is beefing up security, but laid-back Romans took the threats in their stride yesterday.

Berlusconi said Italy is in the firing line, and Romans themselves have felt it ever since he deployed 3,000 troops in Iraq as part of the US coalition, despite massive street protests.

"The level of alert has been raised in Italy as in all European countries," said Interior Minister Giuseppe Pisanu, ahead of an emergency meeting of army, police and intelligence chiefs on the country's National Security Council on Friday.

But fatalism prevailed on the cobblestoned streets of the eternal city.

"The thing is, it's not a matter of if, but when and where, there will be an attack on Italy," similar to the London and Madrid bombings, according to Nicolo, a Milanese lawyer on a business trip to Rome.

He said next year's general election in Italy will be a "period of risk, because they (terrorists) never attack by chance, as we've seen in Madrid and London."

The fall-out from the Madrid bombings on March 11, 2004 toppled the conservative government of Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, who like Berlusconi was a close ally of the US in Iraq.

Though Aznar's government blamed Basque separatists, voters many saying they felt the premier tried to dupe them about the suspected attackers to avoid an electoral backlash for taking Spain into the Iraq war — elected Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, an outspoken opponent of the war who withdrew the troops.

A group calling itself the Organisation of al-Qaeda Jihad in Europe, which claimed responsibility for the London bombings, immediately threatened similar attacks in Denmark and Italy and other countries with troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Flags flew at half-mast on public buildings across the Italian capital, including the presidential Quirinale palace and the city hall, as a mark of respect for the victims of the London bombings.



PHOTO: AFP
British newspapers display headlines yesterday of the terrorist attacks in London the day before. Britain's newspapers responded yesterday to the bomb attacks in London with a mixture of sorrow and blitz-like defiance, vowing never to bow to terrorists

WORLD PRESS CALLS FOR UNITY 'No nation is immune'

AFP, AP, Paris

The world's press called for global unity yesterday in the wake of the deadly bombings in London, warning that no country was safe from terrorism and urging a more coordinated international response.

Newspapers around the world praised Londoners for their courage under fire, but lamented that the attacks had disrupted the Group of Eight (G8) summit in Scotland, where leaders were expected to seal a deal on boosting aid to Africa.

Russia's Vremya Novosti newspaper offered a bleak warning: "The terrorists are among us, they participate in summits and the preparation for the Olympic Games, and they remind us constantly that the world is at war."

In an editorial entitled "Murder in London," The Washington Post wrote: "The bombings proved that the threat of large terrorist attacks remains very real in the democracies allied in combating Islamic extremism.

"Terrorism is drawing near and from now on, no one is safe," cautioned Germany's popular Bild daily.

Israel's Maariv tabloid simply asked: "Who's next in line?"

In Hong Kong, the Chinese-language Apple Daily argued that countries must strengthen their cooperation to root out the "cold-blooded murderers" — a theme taken up by many newspapers around the globe.

The China Daily called the attacks "barbaric", adding: "If the attacks had been plotted to create a sense of fear, it backfired. It has instead aroused a shared belief in collective defence against acts of terror."

Among the challenges to be faced is "fostering world unity" and "securing the public," said USA Today, warning that the rush to pass tough anti-terrorism laws should not override concerns of abuse.

The Wall Street Journal, in an editorial simply titled "7/7/2005", noted the "impressive sight" of Blair "responding to the London terror attacks flanked in solidarity by all the world's major leaders."

Japan's conservative Yomiuri Shimbun called for "a resolute stance" against terror and said, "We must show there is nothing you gain with terrorism."

Arroyo defies mounting calls to quit

REUTERS, Manila

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's hold on the Philippine presidency looked more tenuous yesterday as members of her sacked cabinet, an iconic former president and an influential business group called on her to quit.

But a spokesman for Arroyo, Ricardo Saludo, said it was "not the president's position to resign" as she was not under investigation and no charges had been proved.

Voicing support for Arroyo were Defence Secretary Avelino Cruz, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzales,

Arroyo defies mounting calls to quit

Economic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri and 13 other members of the cabinet.

The military and police were on the highest level of alert in Manila. General Efrén Abu, the military's chief of staff, ordered troops not to intervene in the deepening political crisis at a hastily called meeting of all senior commanders.

Arroyo, due to serve until 2010, is facing the toughest test of her four years as leader over allegations that she tried to influence the vote-count in last year's presidential election and that family members took payoffs from illegal gambling.

Lanka not bound to hold snap polls

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's shaky minority government said yesterday it expected to survive a crucial budget vote later this year and would not be forced to hold snap elections, despite losing the support of its main Marxist ally.

Sri Lanka's constitution requires that the government resign if a finance bill is defeated on the floor of the house. Unless the opposition agrees to take over power, the country must face a snap election.

"We are confident that the government will go on," said government spokesman Nimal Siripala de Silva. "We are not afraid to face elections, but we don't pray for an election."

De Silva argued that the opposition could not defeat a "people-friendly budget" and therefore the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga could survive without the Marxist JVP, or People's Liberation Front.

The JVP walked out last month protesting a tsunami aid-sharing deal with Tamil Tiger rebels.