

Families search for bombing victims

AP, London

In what looked like an eerie replay of Sept. 11, fliers seeking information about people missing in the London terror attacks proliferated on walls and trees around the blast sites Saturday.

Investigators said they are taking seriously a claim of responsibility posted on the Internet by a group calling itself "The Secret Organisation of al-Qaeda in Europe," which they fear may be allied with Iraq's terror chief, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

The name was previously little-known to terror experts, although a Web posting under that title had claimed responsibility for the last major terror attack in Europe: the bombs on commuter trains in Madrid in March 2004, which killed 191 people.

By Saturday morning, rescue crews had reported at least 49 people died in the attacks. The bombs that killed them on three London Underground cars and a double-decker bus were each lighter than 10 pounds and could be carried in a backpack, police said. But they did not say how the explosives were placed or detonated.

The bombs were probably made from simple, relatively easy-to-obtain plastic explosives, not the higher-grade military plastics like Semtex that would have killed far more people, said Andy Oppenheimer, a weapons expert who consults for Jane's Information Group.

However, Roland Jacquard, who heads the Paris-based International Terrorism Observatory, said that bomb experts from Spain sent to London to help assess the explosive devices used in the attacks were of a different opinion.

"For the moment, from what I know, it's a military-type explosive, extremely hard and powerful, difficult to manoeuvre," Jacquard told the AP, based on conversations with people investigating the blast.

Investigators didn't immediately comment on his remarks, which were first reported by French media.

British Transport Police, who oversee the Underground, said crews were still working around the wreckage of a subway train near Russell Square where at least 21 people died.

Crews reached the cars and said they saw more bodies in the hot, rat-infested tunnels, but warned it could take days to retrieve them. Many of the tunnels are more than 100 feet beneath the surface.

"This is an enclosed tunnel and it is very difficult conditions and it's a bit dangerous," Transport Police Deputy Chief Constable Andy Trotter told reporters. "It will take some time before everyone is removed from there."

Sir Ian Blair, commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, said he expected the death toll to rise but doubted it would reach triple digits.

Friends and relatives of the missing scoured London hospitals, bearing photographs of their loved ones. Jamie Gordon's co-workers posted photos of him on trees and walls around where the double-decker blew up. They said they hadn't heard from the 30-year-old Zimbabwean since he called his asset management firm in central London on Thursday to say he was on his way to work aboard a bus.

"Please help us find our friend," the posters read in a scene reminiscent of the desperate search for victims in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terror attacks in the United States.



PHOTO: AFP
The poster of Karolina missing since the bomb attacks is pictured at King's Cross in London yesterday two days after the bomb attacks there. Police investigating the London bomb blasts were probing extremist groups linked to al-Qaeda as recovery teams tried to pull yet more bodies from a wrecked subway train.

London bus driver recounts attack horror

AFP, London

The driver of the London bus blown apart by a bomb that killed at least 13 people revealed yesterday he has been unable to sleep since surviving the attack.

George Psaradakis recounted the nightmare when the roof was ripped clean off his double-decker bus and people were blown apart in Thursday's explosion.

The 49-year-old pulled victims from the wreckage of his number 30 bus before disappearing into the crowds in shock and confusion.

"I cannot believe there was a bomb on the bus. It was a terrible thing to see - terrible," Psaradakis told The Sun newspaper.

"I haven't been able to sleep since because of the pain and still feel very shocked and confused."

The driver told of the moment his number 30 bus turned off central London's Upper Woburn Place at 9:47 am (0847 GMT) Thursday.

Opposition keeps up pressure on Arroyo

AFP, Manila

The Philippine opposition kept up pressure yesterday on President Gloria Arroyo to resign over allegations she cheated in last year's vote, as the military again warned troops to keep neutral in the deepening crisis.

Opposition groups held small demonstrations in the capital to call for Arroyo to quit, after thousands gathered in similar rallies late Friday, while various opposition factions met to plot their next move.

One opposition leaders admitted, however, that their efforts were weakened by having no clear replacement for Arroyo if she is forced to step down.

"The difficulty ... in rallying enough support is that we are now in a crisis of leadership -- a crisis of who will replace President Arroyo," Senator Jamby Madrigal said in an interview with ABS-CBN television.

General Assembly to debate UNSC expansion today

AFP, United Nations

The UN General Assembly is to open a debate Monday on a draft resolution submitted by the so-called G4 -- Japan, Germany, Brazil and India -- on a proposed expansion of the Security Council, assembly sources said Friday.

They said the debate would start at 3:00 pm (1900 GMT) and might run until Tuesday depending on the number of speakers.

The draft resolution, already submitted by the Group of Four to the UN Secretariat Wednesday, provides for an expansion of the UN Security Council from the current 15 members to 25, with the creation of six new permanent seats without right of veto and four non-permanent seats.

Rice in China to talk North Korean nuke

AFP, Beijing

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived in Beijing yesterday for the first leg of a four-nation Asian tour expected to be dominated by efforts to coax North Korea back to nuclear crisis talks.

Rice, who is scheduled to hold talks with Chinese leaders on Sunday, will also visit Thailand, Japan and South Korea. This is her second trip to Asia in just more than three months.

Hurricane Dennis kills 32

REUTERS, Havana

Deadly Hurricane Dennis pummeled Havana into the early morning hours on Saturday, uprooting trees and leaving the city's 2.2 million people in darkness after earlier killing 32 people in south-eastern Cuba and Haiti.

The storm weakened as it crossed Cuba from a ferocious Category 4 hurricane on the five-step Saffir-Simpson scale to a less severe Category 2, but its 110-mph (180 kph) winds still screamed through the deserted streets of the Cuban capital, where many live in decrepit colonial buildings.

Residents said trees were plucked from the ground.

The US National Hurricane Centre in Miami said Dennis -- the strongest hurricane recorded so early in an Atlantic storm season -- would strengthen again on Saturday as it re-emerged over warm open water and skipped south of the Florida Keys.



PHOTO: AFP
Protesters carry anti-Arroyo placards and banners as they march the streets in Manila yesterday calling for President Gloria Arroyo's resignation. The Philippine opposition kept up pressure to oust Arroyo following the mass resignation of key cabinet allies as the military issued renewed warnings to troops to remain neutral.

Iraq rebels attack key infrastructure

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq rebels fired mortars at Baghdad's main oil refinery late Friday in a renewed assault on key infrastructure as a US commander suggested such attacks marked a new twist in insurgent tactics.

A huge fire broke out at the Dura oil refinery on the outskirts of the capital after it was hit by two mortar rounds, oil ministry spokesman Assem Jihad said.

Some 150 firefighters battled the blaze for more than two hours before putting it out. Three people suffered minor burns, Jihad said.

"It appears to be a mortar that hit one of the pipelines attached to one of the reservoirs," Oil Minister Ibrahim Bahr al-Ulum, who visited the plant after the attack, told AFP.

"It is all under control now -- the reservoir is damaged a bit but the refinery will be operating at capacity again."

The Dura refinery, which can handle about 100,000 barrels a day, supplies Baghdad with most of its petrol and fuels a key power plant.

"Dura is the backbone for fulfilling Baghdad's energy needs, there have been several attempts to stop the refinery," the minister said, recalling an attack five days earlier on a key feeder pipeline.

The capital's water supply has also come under mounting attack. On Thursday, insurgents bombed a key main, leaving half the city without water at the height of summer in the third such attack in as many weeks.

Muslims express anger

AFP, London

As the faithful gathered at London Central Mosque for Juma (Friday) prayers, many expressed shame and anger, even as feared a backlash even as they condemned the deadly terror bombings as anti-Islam. Near Regents Park, a few metres (yards) from Park Road where the British capital's iconic red buses and black taxis stream by, hundreds of Muslims gathered before their place of worship, topped with a gold cupola.

The prayer area is full and kneeling men bow low as one and touch their heads to the carpet covering the ground.

"As citizens and co-workers of this great city -- London -- we share the concerns and fears of fellow Londoners," said imam Ashraf Salah, a day after four blasts killed at least 50 people on the subway network and a bus.

"We use the same transport and live and work in the same buildings and any attack is an attack on us all."

One of the blasts, at the Edgware Road underground rail station, took place just a few hundred metres from the mosque.

"We are sorry that this attack is attached to Muslims," he said. "Islam strongly condemns such a sinful act."

Across the country at midday,

imams repeated the same prayer of condolence to the victims intended for the ears of Britain's estimated 1.6 million Muslims.

Despite the fears of a backlash, the head of London police commissioner Ian Blair reported no troubles.

"This is Friday and a day of prayers for Islam and there has been no events, no disturbances no difficulties near the London mosques and that is a great step forward," he told reporters.

Those who came to pray here condemned the attacks, which also injured some 700 people, with almost one voice.

'Newspapers hail Muslim response after attacks'

AFP, London

London's instinctive, defiant response to the bomb atrocities that killed at least 50 people showed the British capital's citizens at their best, Britain's newspapers said yesterday.

As attention turned to the hunt for people still missing after the string of attacks on the city centre, the press lauded those compelled to assist.

With Islamic extremists claiming the slaughter as their own work, newspapers also hailed the Muslim response to the attacks.

"Thursday's atrocities once more brought out the best of Britain," said The Sun, Britain's biggest-selling daily, before saluting the "heroes" of the services who "gave of themselves to save life".

Recalling Londoners' gritty stoicism in the face of relentless World War Two bombing, "Brits are still made of the right stuff," the tabloid reckoned.

The Sun, the Daily Mail, The Independent and the Daily Star featured front-page pictures of the missing, with many newspapers carrying full pages of those still lost with information on their last known whereabouts.

The Daily Mail also hailed the stoic attitude of those caught up in the atrocities.

The Daily Telegraph reckoned British Muslims had shown no doubt

who they identified with after the bombings, saying condemnations of past atrocities had come, rightly or wrongly, with political "buts" tacked on.

The Independent, featuring a full front page of a missing Muslim woman, echoed the same sentiments inside.

Citing the locations of two blasts in areas with large Muslim populations, "Muslims were targeted just as much as any other group of Londoners," it said.

"Any talk of Muslims in general being 'sympathetic' must be exposed as the vile calumny that it is."

BLAIR SAYS World must deal with causes of terrorism

AFP, London

Prime Minister Tony Blair said yesterday the underlying cause of terrorism must be "pulled up by its roots" because bombers prepared to massacre innocents cannot be stopped by surveillance.

"Probably with this type of terrorism the solution cannot only be the security measures. I have never really doubted that myself," Blair said in a BBC interview recorded Friday and broadcast Saturday morning.

"You have got, as a government, to do everything you can to protect your people," he said.

However, if terrorists were prepared to blow up people on trains or buses at random "you can have all the surveillance in the world and you couldn't stop that happening," he said.

"That is why, ultimately, although we have to take the measures necessary, the underlying issues have to be dealt with too, in terms of trying to get rid of this dreadful perversion of the true faith of Islam."

Vulnerable US mass transit systems leave Americans jittery

AFP, Washington

Americans are worried about the vulnerability of their mass transit systems, which were not showered with security investment like airports and airlines after the September 11 terror strikes.

"Americans take public transportation 32 million times a day -- 16 times more often than they travel on domestic airlines -- and yet, when it comes to security, public transportation riders are treated as second-class citizens by the federal government," said American Public Transportation Association chief William Millar.

The US federal government has lavished about 18 billion dollars to make air travel safe, between the September 11, 2001 terror strikes and last May 31, compared to 250 million dollars for making public ground transportation safer, the AFTA says.

It believes the price of making necessary security upgrades at about six billion dollars. Many lawmakers, particularly among opposition Democrats, are pushing the cause.



PHOTO: AFP
Haitians in Grand Goave, 60kms from Port-au-Prince, cross a surging river Friday after the local bridge was swept away by Hurricane Dennis.