

Britain urges people to help catch bombers

2 more suspects detained as Blair talks anti-terror law with opposition, says sorry for slain Brazilian

REUTERS, AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair urged the public to help catch London's bombers, while newspapers said two suspects were believed to be asylum seekers who had received thousands of pounds in state welfare payments.

Blair met opposition leaders yesterday for a summit on possible changes to British anti-terror laws after the London bombings, including police demands to hold suspects without charge for up to three months.

The Downing Street meeting also discussed whether parliament, which began its extended summer break last week, might have to be recalled, Michael Howard, leader of the main opposition Conservative Party said after the talks ended.

Howard and Charles Kennedy, leader of the smaller Liberal Democrats attended the meeting from 9:00 am (0800 GMT), along with interior minister Charles Clarke and the other two parties' home

affairs spokesmen.

Last week, Blair met security service and police chiefs to discuss possible moves including a call by top policemen to extend the time terror suspects can be held from 14 days to as much as three months.

A controversial notion of allowing secret phone taps to be presented as court evidence was also considered on Tuesday.

After the meeting, Blair made an impassioned plea for the world to unite against terrorism and refuse to "give one inch" to their demands.

Repeatedly quizzed at a Downing Street press conference about whether the London bombings this month might have been prompted in some way by the Iraq war, Blair rounded angrily on his critics.

The battle against terrorism must be unequivocal, he insisted.

Blair said he supported giving police expanded powers of detention under proposed changes to anti-terrorist laws in the wake of the London bombings.

"I think it's perfectly reasonable for us in circumstances of great difficulty to have a greater detention in order that there can be the interrogation of people who are suspected of doing this," he told reporters.

"People rightly expect us to take the right measures to increase their security."

Top policemen have called for an extension of the time terror suspects can be held from 14 days to as much as three months.

On another fast-moving day in Britain's biggest manhunt, police said on Monday two men had been arrested under anti-terrorism laws -- bringing the total in custody to five -- but warned they could not rule out another attack.

Police are still hunting for the four suspected bombers behind botched attacks on London's transport network on July 21 that have raised fears among residents that the city is now a firm target for Islamist militants.

At the same time, Blair said he was "desperately sorry" for a major

error in the hunt for the attackers, the death on Friday of a young Brazilian electrician who was shot eight times by anti-terror police.

Armed police raided a housing estate in north London used by at least one of the suspected bombers, as police chiefs said they were racing against time to stop any further attacks by militants they link to al-Qaeda.

Newspapers said on Tuesday one suspect had lived in a flat on the estate and had claimed 23,000 pounds (\$39,990) of state money or so-called "benefits" to pay the rent over six years.

Under the headline "Bomber on Benefits," the top-selling Sun tabloid said 24-year-old Yasin Hassan Omar -- named on Monday as one of the suspects pictured in security camera footage -- helped plot the July 21 attacks while living in the flat.

It said the Home Office (interior ministry) was checking his immigration status.



PHOTO: AFP

Former Nepalese prime minister and president of Nepali Congress/Democratic Party Sher Bahadur Deuba (C) addresses media representatives after he was sentenced at the Royal Commission for Corruption Control (RCCC) office in Kathmandu yesterday. Deuba and a former minister for public works were sentenced to two years in prison and fined the sum of Nepali Rupees 90 million (USDollars 1.26 million) each for their involvement in corruption.

'Pak forces have broken the back of al-Qaeda'

No Pakistanis involved in resort blasts: Egypt envoy

AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf said al-Qaeda was now a worldwide phenomenon but denied the terror group was strong enough in Pakistan to have orchestrated the London and Sharm el-Sheikh bombings.

Even as police investigate possible Pakistani links to both attacks, Musharraf said his country had broken the back of al-Qaeda and captured more than 700 militants loyal to Osama bin Laden.

"It has no command structure originating from Pakistan and conveying messages to the whole world to do this act and do that act under total coordination of some commander," he said.

"Is it possible that an al-Qaeda man sitting here is controlling

events in London or Sharm el-Sheikh or other parts of the world?" he told journalists in the eastern city of Lahore late Tuesday. "This is absolutely wrong."

Musharraf has been under pressure to step up the fight against extremists after it emerged that three of the four suspected July 7 London bombers were Britons of Pakistani origin who had recently visited the country.

Egyptian police on Monday said they were searching for six Pakistani suspects in connection with Saturday's attacks in Sharm el-Sheikh that killed at least 88 people.

In the manhunt, police exchanged fire with Bedouin gunmen who were believed to be hiding the suspects in the mountainous inland areas of Egypt's Sinai peninsula.

"Two Pakistanis had been staying there, and it is suspected that the bombs were assembled in this area," an Egyptian intelligence source said.

Musharraf said suggestions that al-Qaeda was headquartered in Pakistan were "absolutely and totally baseless" and that his government had smashed the group's structure.

But Egypt has told Pakistan that no Pakistani was involved in the weekend's deadly Red Sea resort bombings, Cairo's embassy in Islamabad said yesterday.

Ambassador Hussein Haridy had "informed the Pakistani government late last night that no Pakistani national was involved in the terrorist acts that rocked Sharm el-Sheikh last Saturday," an embassy statement said.

Space shuttle Discovery lifts off

REUTERS, Cape Canaveral

The US space shuttle Discovery blasted off from its launchpad at Cape Canaveral in Florida yesterday in NASA's first shuttle mission since Columbia was destroyed in 2003.

The launch was postponed from July 13 because of a glitch in a fuel sensor.

The shuttle, carrying seven crew members, soared into slightly hazy skies on a plume of smoke and flames, and the roar of its solid booster rockets rattled windows and shook the ground across the Cape.

The booster rockets separated without problem just after 2 minutes into flight, said NASA launch commentator James Hartsfield. Around nine minutes after launch, the shuttle reached its planned preliminary orbit and cut off its three main engines.

The shuttle's mission is to test new safety and repair measures introduced after Columbia disintegrated over Texas on Feb. 1, 2003, after falling foam knocked a hole in its wing on lift-off 16 days earlier.

AMNESTY SAYS Nepali children abused, killed in conflict

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepali children are being killed, illegally detained, tortured and raped in a brutal civil war in the impoverished nation that has claimed thousands of lives, Amnesty International said yesterday.

The London-based global human rights watchdog said children were being abducted and recruited for military activities, and accused both Maoist rebels and government troops of violating their fundamental rights.

"This conflict is a disaster for the children of Nepal," Purna Sen, director of Amnesty International's Asia Pacific Programme, said in a statement.

Amnesty's report was issued just before the UN Security Council was expected to adopt a resolution yesterday that would name and shame nations or rebels abusing children in war zones.

Nepal's Maoist rebels have been

fighting since 1996 to topple the monarchy and set up a single party communist republic. The conflict has cost more than 12,500 lives - hundreds of them children.

"Some children have been directly targeted by one or other party to the conflict, while hundreds more have died from bombs and improvised explosive devices," Sen said.

Thousands of children have been forced to flee their homes and face poverty and exploitation, he said.

"There have been disturbing reports of children suspected of affiliation with the Maoist rebels being detained for long periods in army barracks, police stations or prisons - often held together with adults," Amnesty said.

"Many child detainees report having been tortured by security forces during their detention."

Amnesty said it had received reports of girls being raped by security forces.

ISLAMIC LEADERS DENOUNCE TERRORISM

Australian Muslims fear backlash

AFP, Sydney

Australia's Islamic leaders were urged yesterday to strongly denounce terrorism as the country's Muslim community attempted to distance itself from overseas bomb attacks linked to religious extremists.

The country's main Muslim organisation, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, was sending a letter to about 200 clerics and community leaders urging them to condemn bombings, fearing a backlash following attacks in London and Egypt.

The letters urge clerics to help fight extremism, according to federation chief executive officer Amjad Mehboub.

"We want the Muslim leadership to be united in their thinking and to acknowledge that there is a problem in our midst and then to do something about it," Mehboub told ABC radio.

Preachers will be urged to "also tell the youth that Islam is against violence and terrorism," federation president Ameer Ali said.

Mehboub said his organisation was prompted to draft the letters after talk-back radio callers mounted a "free-for-all" attack against Muslims over the airwaves

on Monday.

"It was a pretty bad day from our perspective," he told the Sydney Morning Herald. "There was talk about getting all the Muslims packing from this country and closing down mosques."

The move also follows comments Prime Minister John Howard made while on a visit to London, in which he attacked Melbourne cleric Sheikh Mohammed Omran for claiming that the United States orchestrated the September 11, 2001 attacks and describing Osama bin Laden as a "good man."

"It's an example of somebody who's saying something utterly unacceptable to the overwhelming majority of Australians including the overwhelming majority of Islamic Australians," Howard told the ABC.

Sheikh Omran has since said he did not endorse the attacks against the United States, but merely supported the work bin Laden did before 2001 in helping Afghans recover from years of war.

Howard, who was Tuesday heading home from trips to the United States, Britain and Iraq where his country has troops, has urged Muslim leaders to make it their "absolute responsibility" not to sow the seeds for militant attacks.

Manmohan had 'very good visit': US

Islamabad downplays Indo-US N-pact

PTI, Washington/ Islamabad

The United States has described Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's recent visit to that country as "very good" and said that New Delhi and Washington moved forward on important issues.

"The two leaders had a very good visit. President George W Bush appreciated the call from Prime Minister Singh after he had returned to India expressing his deep appreciation for the hospitality that the President and Mrs Bush showed," White House press secretary Scott McClellan told reporters here yesterday.

"We were able to move forward on some important priorities. That was all listed in the joint statement that we put out," he said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf yesterday said it was not easy for India to implement its recently signed nuclear deal with the United States as it is difficult to separate civilian and military nuclear programmes, which is a requirement

under the agreement.

"The India-US nuclear deal reached during the just concluded visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Washington was not easy to implement as it cannot be enforced until India segregates its weapons and energy related in nuclear programme," Musharraf said in an interaction with Editors of major media organisations in Lahore.

"It is not an easy thing to separate the civil and military nuclear programme," he said.

The Pakistan President said the proposed acquisition of US-made Patriot missile defence systems by India was a worrying proposition for his country but asserted that the missiles do not have a high success rate.

"The Patriot missiles have a 40 per cent kill probability. 60 per cent is open. It was used in the Gulf war, even scud missile have penetrated them. We know everything and we are aware of everything," Musharraf said adding Pakistan would not lower its guard on defence.



PHOTO: AFP

An Indian demonstrator pleads with riot policemen not to beat him during a violent demonstration in Gurgaon, a New Delhi suburb yesterday. Indian riot police and workers of the Indian unit of Japan's Honda Motor clashed for a second day on New Delhi's outskirts after nearly 130 people were injured in pitched battles on Monday.

Parties slam 'barbaric' police beatings of Indian workers

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's political parties, reflecting rising anger at dramatic television images of police beating hundreds of protesting Honda workers, slammed the government in parliament and called the police "barbaric."

On Monday, policemen were seen hitting hundreds of cowering workers with canes after surrounding them. Many lay prone, bleeding from head injuries, as the police beat them repeatedly.

The police action in Haryana state just outside the capital New Delhi came after a march by more than 2,000 workers of Honda Motorcycles and Scooters India Ltd turned violent.

Workers had beaten up several policemen, attacked government property and burned an official's jeep earlier on Monday. The police response was dramatic.

US recognises N Korea as a 'sovereign nation'

Pyongyang ready to give up nukes

AFP, Beijing

Talks aimed at persuading North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons programme resumed in Beijing yesterday after a 13-month deadlock, with both Pyongyang and Washington setting a tone of conciliation.

The United States said it recognised North Korea as a "sovereign nation" and had no intention to attack, while the Stalinist regime announced it wanted to work towards a nuclear-free peninsula.

The US acknowledgement, just months after Washington described the secretive North as an "outpost of tyranny", will go some way to placating the North, which has long urged the United States to recognise it as a

legitimate government.

But the US made no mention about normalising ties, another key demand of North Korea before it agrees to work on ways to dismantle its atomic weapons.

The United States and North Korea held a "long" bilateral meeting Tuesday following a rare "businesslike" contact the previous day, US and South Korean officials said.

"The United States and North Korea held a bilateral meeting this afternoon," said a US embassy official.

A South Korean official said the meeting started at 2:00 pm (0600 GMT) and "lasted long hours". It was now over, he said.

For its part, the Stalinist state said it was ready to work with other