

## Arrested Pakistani has no terror link, says France

AFP, Paris

A Pakistani man arrested with forged British passports at a Paris airport has no apparent link to any terrorist plot, French prosecutors said Thursday, adding that his case was now being handled as a standard criminal matter.

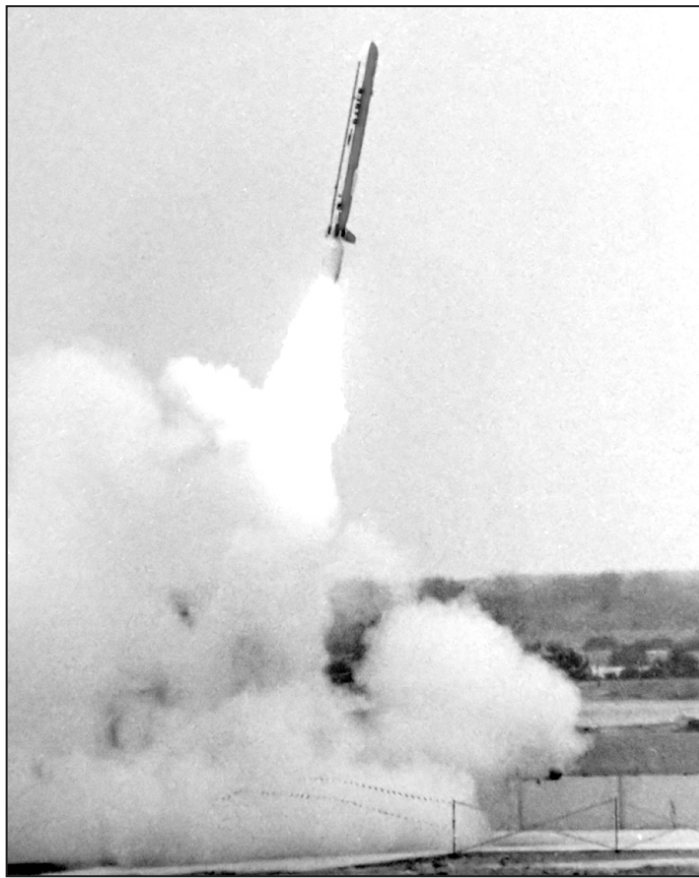
Mohammed Billal Youssaf, 23, a resident of Brescia in Italy, was arrested at Charles de Gaulle airport on Sunday after arriving from the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore and preparing to travel to London.

He had five false British passports and five bogus British driving licenses on him, all of them filled out and containing photographs of different individuals.

The anti-terrorist section of the Paris prosecutor's office initially took charge of the case as his motives and connections were investigated and he was questioned.

"In the current state of the investigations, there is no clear link with any terrorist enterprise," an official at the office said.

Pakistanis are among those being scrutinised after it emerged that three of the four suspected London suicide bombers were British Muslims of Pakistani origin.



This photograph handed out by the Pakistani military shows the launch of Hatf VII Babur missile during a test fire at an undisclosed location yesterday.

## Pak test fires nuclear cruise missile

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan on Thursday successfully test-fired its first cruise missile and joined a select club of nations which have developed the ground-hugging projectiles, the military said.

President Pervez Musharraf hailed the launch of the Hatf VII Babur, which is capable of carrying nuclear warheads, as a "major milestone" in the country's defence programme, an army statement said.

Pakistan did not give advance warning to India, despite a deal made between the two countries to notify each other before missile tests and to set up a hotline to prevent an accidental atomic exchange.

The agreement only refers to ballistic missiles and not to cruise missiles, Pakistani foreign ministry spokesman Muhammad Naeem Khan said.

The military said the launch of the missile, which has a range of 500 kilometres, meant that Pakistan had "joined a select group of countries which have the capability to design and develop cruise missiles".

The scientists and technicians involved had "again done the nation proud by mastering a rare technology", General Musharraf added in

the statement, while Prime Minister Shaoukat Aziz also sent his congratulations.

"It is a gift of the scientists on the birthday of President Musharraf and the Independence Day," state media quoted Information Minister Sheikh Rashid as saying about the test.

Musharraf marked his 62nd birthday on Thursday, while Pakistan celebrates the 58th anniversary of the end of British colonial rule on Sunday.

The missile could avoid radar detection to penetrate hostile defensive systems "with pinpoint accuracy", the statement added, and could also be launched from ships, submarines and aircraft.

According to the Federation of American Scientists, there are at least 12 countries that export cruise missiles: Britain, the United States, China, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and Taiwan.

India unveiled its first cruise missile, a supersonic joint venture with Russia named the BrahMos, in 2001. There was no immediate reaction from New Delhi.

## Deaths fuel fears of epidemic in India

AFP, Mumbai

At least 50 people have died from water-borne diseases plaguing India's financial hub Mumbai and other parts of the western region following the worst-ever recorded rains, health officials said Thursday.

Nearly 2,000 people were being treated in hospitals in the Maharashtra state capital Mumbai and neighbouring districts for suspected leptospirosis, gastroenteritis, cholera, dengue fever and other illnesses, they added.

"In Mumbai, so far 26 deaths have been reported over the past eight to 10 days," Y. Phandse, chairman of the city municipal health committee, told AFP.

Maharashtra state additional director of health services P. Doke reported another 24 deaths in Kalyan, a northeastern district bordering Mumbai.

"Most of the Kalyan deaths are due to suspected leptospirosis and gastroenteritis," he said, adding the

situation was "of concern" but under control.

At the same time, he urged "people to be alert and not take symptoms like fever and vomiting lightly. They should get themselves admitted to clinics or hospitals."

Leptospirosis is caused by exposure to water contaminated with animal urine and its symptoms include high fever and vomiting. It can be treated with antibiotics.

Many people waded through water up to neck-deep to reach safety or get food supplies during the week-long deluge which subsided August 2, leaving mounds of garbage and animal carcasses in its wake.

The rains which killed at least 1,071 people were the worst in the known history of Maharashtra, India's industrial powerhouse.

Television stations broadcast warnings Thursday to boil drinking water and not to wade through dirty water.

People with fevers thronged hospitals as one TV station told

people not "to ignore any symptoms -- head to the nearest hospital."

Civic health officials, however, said there was no immediate cause for alarm in Mumbai, a city of 15 million, or in the rest of the state.

Since the flooding, the state administration and the Red Cross have been running medical camps, doling out antibiotics and other drugs to people hit by the floods.

"Medical relief is being provided in several parts of Mumbai's western, northern and eastern suburbs," said Phandse. "More relief and health camps have been set up today in the western suburbs and the worst-hit flood areas."

Environmentalists and urban planners have blamed the wide-spread flooding in Mumbai on poor drainage caused by unchecked development that has blocked water exits.

The devastation caused by the flooding which paralysed the city has provoked anger in Mumbai, with residents saying the flooding was a "disaster waiting to happen."

## Indian lawyer seeks apology from Blair

IANs, Islamabad

Eighty-one years after an English judge made "derogatory" remarks in his ruling against the Punjabi community of the sub-continent, an Indian lawyer is out to seek the British Prime Minister's apology.

In 1924, the Lahore High Court then headed by an Englishman had passed a verdict saying that any undertaking or statement by a Punjabi on their deathbed was unreliable. And based on that remark, the court ruled against Punjabis and observed they tended to tell lies just before dying.

"Mr Tony (Blair) has to say a sweet word of sorry because it is an insult for my community," Sonia Raj Sood, the lawyer with India's apex court, said on Thursday in Islamabad.

A portion of the judgement says "dying declarations by inhabitants of the Punjab are unsafe as a basis of conviction. The inhabitants of the Punjab often in a dying declaration not only accuse the actual offenders but also include the names of other enemies."

"No human being thinks of lying at his deathbed. I'm shocked why this negative trait has been attributed to Punjabis," Sood said, declaring the verdict as biased and unwarranted.

On July 11, India's apex court rejected her petition seeking expulsion of derogatory remarks against the Punjabi community, saying the case was out of its jurisdiction.

But she has now turned to the Pakistani apex court with the hope of getting a favourable ruling that might redeem the image of Punjabis in India and Pakistan.

## COURT STAYS KING'S BAN

# Nepal radio stations resume newscasts

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's private FM radios resumed news broadcasts on Thursday after the Supreme Court effectively stayed a ban on bulletins imposed after King Gyanendra seized power in February, a radio group said.

The court issued the order late Wednesday while hearing a petition challenging a government order that private Nepal FM be closed down for defying the ban, said Raghu Mainali, coordinator of the Save the Independent Radio Movement (SIRM).

The petition was filed by Nepal FM managing director Bishnu Hari Dhakal on Monday.

In his order, Justice Anup Raj Sharma told the government not to

go ahead with its plans to close down the station and questioned the grounds on which it was acting, Mainali said.

The court would make a final ruling once it received a written reply from the Information and Communications Ministry, Judge Sharma had said.

"We are very happy that the apex court has once again protected the people's right to information," Mainali said, adding that the order had paved the way for the resumption of news bulletins by 52 private FM stations across the Himalayan kingdom.

SIRM spokesman Ghamaraj Luintel, who runs Kathmandu-based Radio Sagarmatha, also welcomed the court order, saying

Thursday his station had already begun broadcasting news bulletins.

All other stations were expected to follow suit, Luintel said.

The ban was slapped on the FM stations after Gyanendra sacked the elected government and assumed full powers on February 1, saying his action was necessary to deal with an ongoing Maoist insurgency.

Since then, the stations have been airing only entertainment and social programmes but twice defied the ban -- on July 7 to broadcast news on activities relating to the monarch's birthday and on June 15, when he visited Doha.

Nepal FM had also been running a programme that focused on social and development issues.



Pakistani former cricketer-turned-politician, Imran Khan (R) speaks during a meeting of all the opposition parties of the country, in Islamabad yesterday. The meeting, attended by the leaders of all the opposition parties, was organized to discuss the political situation of the country.

## Mumbai twin blasts accused not discharged

PTI, Mumbai

Despite recommendation of the POTA Review Committee, a special court in India on Thursday refused to discharge two accused held for conspiring the twin blasts in Mumbai in August 2003, on the ground that there was sufficient evidence against them.

Hearing the plea of accused, Mohammed Ansari alias Usman Ladduwala and Mohammed Ansar Shaikh alias Hasan Batterywala, designated POTA Judge A P Bhangale agreed with prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam that there was enough evidence against the duo.

The POTA Review Committee had recommended that the two accused should be discharged from the case as there was no material against them.

## Avoid use of word 'minority': SC

PTI, New Delhi

Defining the ultimate aim of a democracy like India, the Supreme Court has said the practice of listing religious groups as "minority communities" should be discouraged and the list gradually be done away with as it promotes divisive tendencies to weaken the nation.

A three-judge Bench comprising Chief Justice R C Lahoti, Justice D M Dharmadhikari and Justice P K Balasubramnyan reminded the Minorities Commissions set up by the Centre and state governments that the goal of the Constitution was to create social conditions where there was no need to shield or protect rights of minority or majority communities.

"The commissions, instead of encouraging claims from communi-

ties for being added to a list of notified minorities, should suggest ways to help create social conditions where the list is gradually reduced and done away with altogether," said Justice Dharmadhikari, writing for the Bench recently.

This ruling was given while disposing of a petition demanding minority status for the Jain community. The Bench accepted the Centre's stand that it was for the states to determine whether Jains were a minority community depending on their social condition in their respective states.

The court said if each minority group felt afraid of the other group, an atmosphere of mutual fear and distrust would be created posing serious threat to the integrity of the nation leading to sowing of seeds of multinationalism.