

Working class bears the brunt of blasts

AFP, New Delhi

Rickshaw driver Ram Pravesh Rai is typical of many of the blue-collar workers killed or maimed by New Delhi's bomb blasts.

The father of three was one of those hit by Saturday night's explosion at Paharganj market but it was not till he regained regained consciousness Sunday that he was reunited with his family.

Like Rai, several of the victims are blue-collars workers -- such as cleaning ladies or small shopowners -- who are the backbone of the city.

One patient's address at Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital was simply "the snack food shop" at Paharganj.

Victims were also mainly young.

The oldest patient at Ram Manohar Lohia was 50, the youngest -- who has since died -- was a seven-month-old boy.

At least 61 people were killed and 188 injured in the attacks at Paharganj and Sarojini Nagar markets, and on a bus. An unknown group calling itself Inquilab (revolution) claimed responsibility in calls to reporters in the revolt-hit region of Kashmir.

Weak and barely able to speak, Rai told a nurse on Sunday morning that he could not recall much about the Saturday night blast.

"I don't remember anything, I was trying to flee and I passed out," said Rai, his eyes glazed, before lapsing into sleep.

On Saturday night an AFP corre-

spondent saw Rai, with a gash above his eye and his face swollen, lying alone and unconscious on a stretcher.

It was not till Sunday morning that he was able to identify himself to a man visiting a patient in the next bed, who then called his family.

They immediately rushed to the hospital and have been there since dawn.

Most victims of the Paharganj blast were taken to two hospitals in central Delhi -- Ram Manohar Lohia and Lady Harding -- while victims of the Sarojini Nagar explosion, the deadliest of the night's attacks, were taken to a hospital in south Delhi.

Many of the dead are still unidentified, television reports said.

Rai's stay at the hospital was cha-

otic. He was moved from the burns ward to the neurosurgery ward after being diagnosed with a head injury that caused heavy bleeding from his ear.

"His ear is bleeding a lot and he's been retching," said his worried mother, Jaya Devi, as she adjusted a piece of cotton wadding stemming the flow.

Hospital workers poured soapy water on the ward floor, scrubbing it down after dealing with the deluge of patients.

Jaya Devi said she had had no idea last night that her eldest son had been injured in the bomb blasts. She thought he was out late driving his motorised rickshaw.



PHOTO: AFP

An Indian woman consoles her relative Sunita (L), mother of a girl killed on Saturday when a blast ripped through the Paharganj area of New Delhi. Indian police handed out a sketch of a suspect in blasts that killed at least 61 people in New Delhi as experts said one bomb might have been made by explosives packed in a pressure cooker.

Delhi blasts dim Diwali

REUTERS, New Delhi

Three bombs that killed at least 50 people in New Delhi on Saturday come just days before the country celebrates Diwali, one of their most important festivals, and Muslims end their fasting month.

The ancient Diwali marks the victory of god Rama over the demon Ravana. Many people also worship the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, during what is a time for family and to pray for prosperity.

Diwali is celebrated by bursting firecrackers and lighting up homes with earthen lamps, candles and party lights. Small lamps are also set afloat on sacred rivers.

In the days leading up to the celebrations, loud bangs and flashes from fireworks fill the nights.

Since Friday evening, the streets of New Delhi have been bustling with people doing last-minute shopping for Diwali on Tuesday and the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Fitr a few days later.

KASHMIR QUAKE AID Crossing deal brings relief on both sides

AFP, Tangdaar

More than three weeks after the devastating South Asian earthquake, Mohammad Asif has no idea whether his relatives on the other side of Kashmir are still alive or not.

But like many in both parts of the divided Himalayan region that has twice brought India and Pakistan to war, he welcomed Sunday's agree-

ment to open up the de facto border to speed relief efforts to the suffering.

"This is the best gift both the governments can give us," said Asif, a 28-year-old teacher in a primary school in the border village of Tangdaar on the Indian side that has been shut since the massive October 8 quake.

"I will definitely go and meet my uncle, who is a tailor in Pakistan. I

have never met his family and we got a letter from him a month ago. I do not know whether he and his relatives are alive or not," he told AFP.

The agreement came a week after Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf proposed allowing the two-way movement of Kashmiris across the so-called Line of Control (LoC) to help the millions left homeless by the disaster.

World leaders slam 'terrorist outrage'

AFP, New Delhi

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan led international condemnation yesterday against "terrorist" bombings which claimed at least 61 lives in the Indian capital New Delhi.

"The secretary general is appalled by and condemns the series of terrorist bombings which have resulted in many deaths in the Indian capital," a statement released by Annan's press office said.

Islamabad was among the first to condemn the bombings and call for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

"The attack in a crowded marketplace is a criminal act of terrorism," the Pakistani foreign ministry said.

Messages of condemnation and condolences poured in from around the world.

Washington called the bomb blasts "another sad reminder that terror knows no borders".

"These acts are made more heinous in that they deliberately targeted innocent civilians preparing for holiday celebrations," US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said in a

statement.

India's former colonial ruler Britain condemned the "appalling attacks" which Foreign Secretary Jack Straw called "yet another example of terrorists' cynical and callous disregard for human life."

Australian Prime Minister John Howard, noting that the target was not political but a market, called it a dreadful attack.

In Bangladesh, Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan called the bombings a "heinous act" and officials bolstered security in and around the capital Dhaka, where a meeting of South Asian leaders is just two weeks away.

Japan, the Philippines and Afghanistan also condemned the attacks.

"It is an extremely cowardly and unforgivable act," Yoshinori Katori, a Japanese foreign ministry spokesman said in a statement.

Elsewhere, Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin called the violence "beyond deplorable", while South African President Thabo Mbeki offered condolences for the "dastardly act of terror".

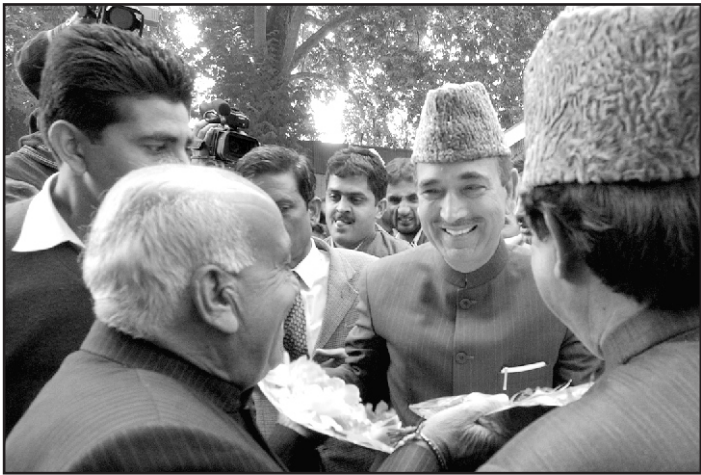


PHOTO: AFP

Indian senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad (C) is welcomed by Congress leaders in Srinagar yesterday. Azad will be sworn in as the new Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir on November 2, three years after a coalition government took power in the northern state.