

'6 bombs planted on Indo-Pak train'

AFP, New Delhi

Detectives probing the deaths of 68 people aboard the India-Pakistan "Friendship Express" have found that a total of six bombs were planted in three carriages, a report said yesterday.

The police have also lifted a clear set of fingerprints from one of the two unexploded devices, The Indian Express said.

All the bombs were hidden in suitcases left by the entrances of the carriages, effectively sealing escape routes, it said.

While four bombs exploded in two carriages -- killing to death 68 passengers and injuring 12 on the night of February 18 -- two other devices in the third carriage did not explode due to a "timing" error.

Police had previously said the casualties were caused by just two bombs that went off in adjacent train cars.

"All the bombs were to go off at the same time -- at midnight," railways police superintendent Bharti Arora, told the daily.

British foreign secy meets Musharraf

AFP, Islamabad

British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett held talks with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf yesterday amid concerns about the spiraling Taliban insurgency in neighbouring Afghanistan, officials said.

Beckett's trip to Islamabad coincided with a surprise visit here by US Vice-President Dick Cheney as Pakistan's western allies ratchet up the pressure on Musharraf to crack down on militants in its border areas.

During talks with Beckett at the presidential palace, Musharraf "called for a comprehensive strategy and economic reconstruction for effectively dealing with the militant activities in Afghanistan", a government statement said.

US renews offer of talks with Iran

Key powers seek united front, Tehran ready for unconditional talks

AFP, Washington/ London

On the eve of a big-power meeting on Iran, the United States reaffirmed its offer of direct talks with the Islamic Republic, if it suspends its work on uranium enrichment.

Key world powers grappling to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions sought yesterday to downplay signs of tension over how to keep pressure on Tehran, as Russia voiced concern at talk of a military option.

Britain, hosting a meeting of senior officials from six countries including the United States, insisted that the international community remains united in seeking to persuade Tehran to back down, despite its latest snub.

"I think Iran should not in any way mistake private discussions (which are) taking place for weak-

ening of resolve, quite the reverse," said a spokesman for British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

"We're leaving open the track of negotiations, because the best way to resolve this would be to have Iran come to the table," Rice said in an interview on Fox News Sunday.

Iran and the United States have had no diplomatic relations since Washington severed ties in 1980 in the wake of the seizure of its embassy in Tehran by Islamists.

Though earlier on Sunday, Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad insisted his government would press ahead with its uranium enrichment regardless of UN threats, comparing the programme -- which Tehran insists is aimed only at producing nuclear power -- to a runaway train.

"Iran has reached the technology to produce nuclear fuel and Iran's movement on this path is like a train on a one-way track with no room for stopping, reverse gear or

braking," he said.

"They don't need a reverse gear, they need a stop button," retorted Rice. "Then we can come to the table and we can talk about how to move forward."

Rice said UN and US sanctions imposed on Tehran since December after Iran refused to comply with an earlier demand it suspend its enrichment programme were beginning to fuel dissatisfaction among Iranians over Ahmadinejad's actions.

"People are looking hard at investment in Iran, at the reputational risk, the investment risk of dealing with a country that is under Chapter 7 status," she said, referring to the mandatory UN sanctions resolution passed in December.



PHOTO: AFP
Bosnians demonstrate yesterday in front of the premises of the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The International Court of Justice ruled Monday that the 1995 massacre of nearly 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica was genocide, as it considered the question of Serbian responsibility.

Srebrenica massacre was genocide, rules UN court

AFP, The Hague

The International Court of Justice ruled yesterday that the 1995 massacre of nearly 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica was an act of genocide and has convicted two former Bosnian Serb military officers for aiding and abetting the slaughter.

In the initial part of its ruling, it said the massacre at Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia was an act of genocide but that other mass killings during the war were not.

It said Serbia had made "considerable military and financial support" available to the Bosnian Serb leadership during the war but the court did not make any immediate comment about its alleged involvement in genocide.

Bosnia has accused Serbia of masterminding the widespread "ethnic cleansing" of Bosnian Muslims and Croats during the brutal inter-ethnic war in the former Yugoslavia from 1992 to 1995.

The Bosnian government has demanded reparations while Serbia has insisted the ICJ has no jurisdiction in the matter.

If Serbia is found guilty it would be a moral victory for Bosnia and could lead to reparations amounting to millions of euros (dollars).

The 16-judge ICJ panel is

expected to take several hours to read the verdict, which will be final with no room for appeal.

In the initial part of its ruling, it said the massacre at Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia was an act of genocide and has convicted two former Bosnian Serb military officers for aiding and abetting the slaughter.

But Monday's ruling will be the first from an international court on whether the genocide was the policy of the government of Serbia, a former Yugoslav republic neighbouring Bosnia.

Serbia under then-president Slobodan Milosevic was the main backer of ethnic Serb forces in Bosnia, and Milosevic is seen as the architect of their campaign to forcibly expel non-Serbs from swathes of the Bosnian countryside.

He died in UN custody last year before any verdict could be reached on the genocide and war crimes charges against him in the ICTY. He maintained his innocence to the end, saying genocide was not the policy of his regime.

The International Criminal

14 Iranian troops killed in helicopter crash

AFP, Tehran

Fourteen Iranian military personnel were killed in a helicopter crash last week during an operation against rebels close to the Turkish border, the Revolutionary Guards confirmed yesterday.

A statement carried by the ISNA agency said that two commanders of the Guards' ground force and 12 other military personnel were killed in Friday's accident. Kurdish rebels had claimed they shot down the aircraft.

"Commanders Ghahari Said and Dorost of the Guards' Hamzeh Army 3, along with 12 other members of the Islamic republic's army and the Guards, were martyred in the helicopter accident," the army statement said.

It said the operation against the "mercenary elements opposing the Islamic republic was carried out in the valleys close to the town of Khouy 50km from the Turkish border.

Iranian state media had earlier reported that the crash was "an

accident due to bad weather." The Revolutionary Guards had said on Saturday they killed 17 rebels in the operation after besieging them.

Pejak, a Kurdish rebel group fighting in Iran, claimed on Sunday that it had shot down an Iranian helicopter.

The group, linked to Turkey's outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), also claimed to have fought an hour-long battle with Iranian troops and to have killed 20 soldiers, including senior officers.

Pejak's statement, which was distributed to reporters in two cities in northern Iraq's Kurdish autonomous region, said the group had captured a survivor from the helicopter crash and killed the chief of the Iranian army's 3rd Corps.

Iran's north-western West Azerbaijan province, which borders Turkey and Iraq, is the scene of regular armed clashes between Iranian border guards and Kurdish militant parties, Pejak in particular.

The 16-judge ICJ panel is

Gore's Oscar sparks new presidential speculation

AFP, Hollywood

Flush with an Oscar for his environmental jeremiad "An Inconvenient Truth," Al Gore faces growing speculation whether he might ride the winds of political climate change to a new bid for the presidency.

The Democrat insists he has no plans to run for the White House in 2008, eight years after being edged out by George W. Bush in a bruising recount battle that still smarts today.

But the former vice president's bandwagon may be gaining steam, fuelled by an Academy Award on Sunday for best documentary and a global warming issue whose time appears to have come.

Gore, 58, did little to curb expectations as he appeared on stage at Sunday's ceremonies with heartthrob Leonardo DiCaprio to hail the use of "environmentally intelligent

practices" in producing the awards show.

Prodded by DiCaprio whether he had any other major announcement to make, Gore started to mock a "my fellow Americans" declaration of his intentions -- only to be drowned out by the orchestra and hustled off stage.

Some political commentators see Gore as a solid compromise candidate for Democrats if frontrunners Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards battle to a stalemate in next year's nomination tussles.

The London-based Economist magazine dubbed Gore an "ideal" choice for Democrats, with his early opposition to the Iraq war, his environmental credentials and a grudge to settle with Bush.

"What better way of wiping out the Bush era than replacing him with the man who should have been president," the weekly said in its latest issue.



PHOTO: AFP
Davis Guggenheim (3rd R) and former US vice president Al Gore (3L) pose with other crew members and their Oscar statue after being named Best Documentary Feature for "An Inconvenient Truth" at the 79th Academy Awards in Hollywood, California, on Sunday.

Iraqi VP, minister hurt in bomb attack

12 killed in violence

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq's vice president and its public works minister were both slightly hurt yesterday when a bomb hidden in the ceiling of the ministry building exploded, a lawmaker in their party said.

Four other people were killed in the attack, medics said.

The senior Shiite officials were quickly released from a US military hospital after doctors established that they had only received "scratches," the lawmaker said.

Vice President Adel Mahdi was arriving for a meeting with his fellow Shiite minister Riyad Ghraib when the attack took place, but was only lightly hurt and was later released from hospital, Jalal al-Din al-Saghir said.

"The vice president got a scratch on his foot," the Shiite lawmaker said.

"He went to Ibn Sina Hospital and he was given the normal tests. He left immediately afterwards and he's in his office," he told AFP.

"The explosion happened when the party arrived at the

meeting room. It appears that according to the first reports we have that the bomb was in the ceiling of the room," he added.

"The minister was wounded in the same way. He went to hospital and left later. He also just had scratches," he said.

Security officials and medics said that at least four people were killed -- including a senior ministry official -- and 26 more were wounded.

Meanwhile, five policemen and three civilians were killed on Monday in a series of bombings and mortar and gun attacks in Baghdad and the surrounding region, an Iraqi security official said.

Two policemen were killed in a bombing while on early morning patrol in the southeastern district of Rustumiyah, a security official said, adding that the explosion also injured another officer.

A bomb attack on another police patrol in the Madain region southeast of the capital killed three policemen and injured two, the official said.