

Two held over India-Pakistan train bombing

AFP, New Delhi

Two men were arrested in India yesterday on suspicion of links to last month's bombing of an India-Pakistan train which killed 68 people, a senior police official told AFP.

"The two men were picked up (the central Indian city of) Indore," said R.C. Mishra, deputy inspector general of police in the northern state of Haryana, where the attack took place.

"They were linked to the purchase of the suitcases in which the bombs were packed," the police official and top investigator told AFP.

Mishra did not identify the two, but the Press Trust of India news agency said they were bag shop managers who had supplied the covers for the suitcases in which the bombs were concealed.

They were named as Huzaifa, a Muslim, and Poonam Singh Thakur, a Hindu.

The pair were being questioned in Indore and would be taken to Haryana later in the day, it said. It was not clear if the two were suspected of being directly involved in the plot.

The blasts -- caused by the explosion of four bombs -- occurred about midnight on February 18, killing mainly Muslims who were travelling home to Pakistan on the cross-border "Friendship Express".

The attack appeared to be aimed at undermining the stop-go peace process between India and Pakistan launched in 2004.

Indian police teams have released sketches of two suspects who were believed to have planted the bombs, and briefly detained seven people from three northern states for questioning last month.

N Korean negotiator 'too busy' to meet IAEA chief

REUTER, Beijing

The chief of the UN nuclear watchdog held the agency's first negotiations with North Korea in more than four years in Pyongyang yesterday but was told the North's top nuclear negotiator was too busy to meet him.

International Atomic Energy Agency head Mohamed ElBaradei met another vice foreign minister and the head of the North's atomic energy agency, Ri Je-son, instead, an IAEA spokeswoman said.

ElBaradei's visit is the first by the agency since late 2002, when North Korea expelled its inspectors as an earlier disarmament deal fell apart. It withdrew from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty days later.

IAEA spokeswoman Melissa Fleming said a meeting with nuclear envoy Kim Kye-gwan was unlikely.

"We were told he is busy working

on the upcoming six-party talks," Fleming told Reuters by telephone from Pyongyang, referring to a Beijing forum grouping the two Koreas, China, the United States, Japan and Russia.

Kim led his country's team when a six-way deal was reached in February in which North Korea agreed to shut the Yongbyon reactor at the heart of its nuclear program in exchange for energy aid and security guarantees.

After meeting Ri, ElBaradei was also due to meet Kim Yong-dae, vice president of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly, the North's rubber-stamp parliament.

Arriving in Beijing ahead of the new round of six-party talks opening on Monday, chief US negotiator Christopher Hill said the lack of a meeting between Kim and ElBaradei was not necessarily a bad

sign.

"I understood it was because Mr. Kim Kye-gwan was busy with the six parties and I think Mr. ElBaradei had a lot of technical meetings. So we'll know better when we talk to Mr. ElBaradei," Hill told reporters.

SHUTTING YONGBYON

Under the terms of the February agreement, the Yongbyon reactor, which makes plutonium that can be used in nuclear weapons, must be shut by mid-April in return for an initial heavy fuel oil shipment.

But South Korean Foreign Minister Song Min-soon said North Korea had shown no signs of closing the reactor. North Korea tested its first nuclear device last October, drawing widespread condemnation and UN sanctions.

"There is no indication of a change in the operational condition of Yongbyon," Song told a news conference in Seoul.

Earlier this week, a US official said North Korea was preparing to shut down the Yongbyon complex, but other US officials have been more guarded.

The IAEA, which is trying to iron out the details of a return of its inspectors to North Korea, will be key to verifying whether the reclusive state makes good on its pledge.

China was again at the centre of the multilateral waltz as diplomats headed to Beijing to push forward the February 13 deal.

In addition to Hill, South Korean envoy Chun Yung-woo arrived for working-group meetings. Both envoys, along with China's Wu Dawei, will take part in discussions aimed at fleshing out parts of the agreement dealing with disarmament and energy.

Kabul says Pakistan fencing border

AFP, Kabul

Pakistan has started fencing parts of its border with Afghanistan, the Afghan defence ministry said Tuesday as the government raised objections, saying the unmarked frontier was disputed.

Pakistan officials denied they had done any fencing, but said work

was set to begin.

Visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher said meanwhile efforts to control the movement of militants across the rugged border should be agreed by all sides.

"According to Afghan military intelligence, they have started fencing the border in an area opposite to Barmal," defence ministry spokesman General Mohammad Zahir Azimi told AFP.

Barmal is in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province. President Pervez Musharraf said in February Pakistan would fence 35 kilometres (22 miles) of its northwestern border to restrict the movement of Taliban militants.

"The Islamic government of Afghanistan strongly opposes this," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

It also denied that the erection of

barbed-wire fencing on parts of the 2,500-kilometre (1,500-mile) border would do much to prevent militants trained and equipped in Pakistan from crossing over to carry out attacks.

"This won't help the war on terrorism," the ministry said. "The other reality is that the (current) border is not acceptable to both countries ... so here the question is in which country this barbed wire would be erected."

Afghan officials still refer to the border as the Durand Line, its name when it was drawn up in 1893 by British India, which once included Pakistan, to divide powerful ethnic Pashtun tribes.

"We should bear in mind that in most areas, the so-called Durand Line is not clear," the defence ministry said separately. A fence in the area would separate tribes and families living on either side, it added.

Saddam's sons buried next to him in their home village

AFP, Tikrit

The remains of Saddam Hussein's two sons were exhumated and reburied next to the executed ex-president in a hall in their home village of Awjah in northern Iraq on Tuesday, a relative told AFP.

Uday and Qusay, killed by US troops in Mosul in July 2003, were earlier buried in a cemetery in the village, just outside the city of Tikrit.

"But today we dug up their remains and reburied them next to Saddam Hussein in the hall where he was laid to rest," the relative said on condition of anonymity.

Saddam was buried on December 31 after his hanging for crimes against humanity.

The hall where the three are buried used to be a gathering place for condolence meetings under the ousted regime.



Kashmiri fisherwomen prepare fish for customers as they sit on a snow covered bridge in Srinagar yesterday. The Jammu-Srinagar highway remained closed to vehicular traffic for a fourth straight day following landslides triggered by rains.

Musharraf's tough line on judiciary could backfire

AFP, Islamabad

President Pervez Musharraf's decision to fire Pakistan's chief justice has played into the hands of his opponents, who are now more unified than ever, analysts say.

Musharraf suspended Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry on Friday alleging abuse of power. Observers suggest the military ruler's real motive was to weaken the judiciary ahead of a controversial plan to get reelected in uniform.

Whatever his intentions, the sacking sparked violent protests by lawyers, warnings of a constitutional crisis and -- crucially -- united Pakistan's warring opposition parties like never before.

Chaudhry appeared before a judicial panel at the Supreme Court building in Islamabad on Tuesday amid scuffles between lawyers and police. A day earlier, dozens of people were wounded in similar clashes in Lahore.

"This is first shot across Musharraf's bows and the unrest caused by the sacking of the chief justice suggests the road ahead for

Musharraf is going to be very difficult," political analyst Najam Sethi told AFP.

Musharraf has never been afraid to deal with the courts. In 2000 he dismissed 18 judges, including the chief justice, for failing to take oaths of office under a provisional constitution issued after his October 1999 coup.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Chaudhry's 20-month tenure was marked by bold decisions such as overturning a deal to sell the state-run steel mill and admonishing the authorities over the "disappearance" of scores of people in the "war on terror."

Sethi, however, said Musharraf's move would backfire by harming his image both at home, where he portrays himself as the cure for corruption and instability, and also internationally as a key US ally.

Musharraf has promised fair and transparent elections this year, but opponents say this is impossible

without an independent judiciary, a powerful election commission and a neutral caretaker setup based on consensus.

"This clipped judiciary will be of no service to Musharraf when he needs it in months ahead to gain legitimacy, which he is desperate to get to satisfy Western concerns for political stability in the country," Sethi said.

Musharraf has ridden out numerous crises during his seven years in power, the toughest his decision to abandon the Taliban and back the US invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001.

He has also survived two al-Qaeda assassinations and overcome public anger over military operations in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan and in southwestern Baluchistan province.

Politically, his role as chief of Pakistan's powerful army meant he was able to appoint himself president in June 2001 and push through a disputed referendum victory allowing him to remain president until the end of 2007.



Demonstrators wearing balaclavas wave Mexican flags and shout slogans against US President Bush in Merida City, state of Yucatan, Mexico Tuesday.

Mortar attack on Somali president house kills 8

AFP, Mogadishu

At least eight people were killed during a mortar bomb attack on Somalia's presidential palace, hospital officials said yesterday.

The strike on Tuesday came hours after President Abdullahi Yusuf fled into the anarchic capital, Mogadishu, where insurgents have attacked government forces and their allies on an almost daily basis.

"Fourteen people were brought in and two died," a Madina Hospital worker, who did not want to be named, told Reuters.

Other hospital officials and residents said six more people were also killed and a total of 33 injured by the attack on the hilltop Villa Somalia palace, and the ensuing retaliatory gunfire from government

and Ethiopian troops.

Most blame the insurgency on remnants of a hardline Islamist movement defeated by the government with Ethiopian military backing in a two-week war that spanned the New Year. It ended a six-month Islamist reign over most of southern Somalia.

Though aimed at the government and its allies including African Union (AU) peacekeepers who arrived earlier this month, civilians are invariably caught up in the violence, and Tuesday's was no exception.

"Four of my children were injured when a mortar hit our house," said Safia Abdirahman, a resident of Yaqshid. "We are poor civilians. I have been living safely in that house for the last 16 years,

the whole duration of the civil war."

Yusuf was elected in 2004 but could not set foot in Mogadishu until this year because he feared for his safety as an outsider. He came back to the coastal city again amid tight security on Tuesday.

The still-struggling interim government had on Monday voted to move to Mogadishu from its current seat in Baidoa, a relatively safer south-central trading outpost.

Yusuf's administration is anxious to impose its authority on the country after being relegated until the December war to temporary bases in outlying towns -- and for a time after its 2004 creation, in neighboring Kenya.