

2005 LONDON ATTACKS

3 accused of conspiring with suicide bombers remanded

AFP, London

Three men accused of conspiring with the four suicide bombers who attacked London in 2005, killing themselves and 52 others, were remanded in custody yesterday when they appeared in court.

Mohammed Shakil, 30, Sadeer Saleem, 26, and Waheed Ali, 23, are the first people to be charged in connection with the near-simultaneous rush-hour attacks on July 7, 2005 that also injured more than 700.

The trio, all from the Beeston area of Leeds, northern England, were remanded in custody at the City of Westminster Magistrates Court until a further hearing on April 20, the BBC and Sky News television reported.

The hearing lasted about one hour. Only Saleem applied for bail, but it was refused. The men are not required to enter a plea at this stage.

Two of the men were arrested as they were about to board a flight to Pakistan from Manchester Airport, northwest England, on March 22.

The other was arrested at his home address in the Beeston area of Leeds, northern England, on the same day.

They were jointly charged on Thursday with conspiracy to cause explosions likely to endanger life.

Their alleged co-conspirators are the four men who detonated the homemade rucksack bombs on three Underground trains and bus: Mohammed Sidique Khan, Shezhad Tanweer, Jermaine Lindsay and Hasib Hussain.

The alleged targets of the conspiracy were the Transport for London system "and/or tourist attractions in London". The attractions were not specified in the details of the charge.

Shakil, Saleem and Ali are all from Beeston, where Khan,

Tanweer and Hussain had strong connections, but Ali – until recently known as Shilon Ullah – has been living in east London.

Announcing the charges on Thursday, the Crown Prosecution Service's head of counter-terrorism, Sue Hemming, said:

"The allegation is that they were involved in reconnaissance and planning for a plot with those ultimately responsible for the bombings on July 7 before the plan was finalised."

The allegations did not relate to the specific explosions which occurred on the day but to "earlier planning and reconnaissance", she added.

The charge alleges that between November 1, 2004 and June 29, 2005, they "unlawfully and maliciously" conspired with Khan, Tanweer, Lindsay and Hussain to cause "by explosive substance, explosions on the Transport for

London system and/or tourist attractions in London of a nature likely to endanger life or cause serious injury to property".

Although the three were arrested under anti-terrorism legislation, they are charged with breaching the Explosive Substances Act 1883.

The July 7 bombings prompted soul-searching about the extent of Muslim integration in British society.

Khan, the suspected ringleader, and Tanweer said in videos recorded before their deaths that British foreign policy, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, motivated their actions.

The Metropolitan Police said last month that they had always been keen to determine whether anyone else helped the four and investigations had been taking place at home and abroad in the intervening 21 months.

UTTAR PRADESH GOES TO POLLS

Murderers, bandits among candidates

AFP, Kanpur

Voters headed to the polls under tight security yesterday in India's most populous state Uttar Pradesh with tens of millions of people eligible to cast ballots during the month-long elections.

Voters were choosing from parties headed by colourful characters – including a former wrestler and a woman from India's untouchable classes – both with corruption allegations hanging over their heads.

Accused murderers and bandits were also among the candidates in the state, known as one of India's most crime-ridden.

More than 50,000 paramilitary forces were dispatched to polling sites in the first 62 constituencies voting yesterday to ensure peaceful voting.

The national Election Commission was seeking to ensure clean elections as previous polls have been marked by violent clashes between rival supporters.

Some 16 million voters could cast ballots in the first round of the marathon poll being held in seven stages in the state of 170 million people.

Some 403 seats are up for grabs in the election which wraps up in May with two regional parties – the ruling Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party – running neck and neck, according to opinion polls.

Police were placed at polling stations in the state's largest city, Kanpur, a former mill town of 2.7 million that is studded with gun shops.

"Things are going smoothly, there's absolutely no problem, we



2005 file photo shows Nicolas Sarkozy (L) and Azouz Begag at the National Assembly in Paris.

Sarkozy threatened to smash my face in

Says former French minister

AFP, Paris

A former French minister who has turned against his party's presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy recounts in a new book that Sarkozy once threatened to "smash" his face in.

Sarkozy on Friday rejected the accusation by Azouz Begag as a "shameless lie" and in turn accused Begag of attention-seeking.

Begag, who resigned as equal opportunities minister on Thursday to support the centrist presidential candidate Francois Bayrou, fell out with Sarkozy because of his tough stance on law and order and immigration.

In a book to be published next week, Begag, who is of Algerian

descent, says Sarkozy's allies systematically dismissed him as the government's "token Arab."

He recounts an episode, just after riots that took place across France in late 2005, in which he publicly distanced himself from Sarkozy's use of the word "rabble" to describe young delinquents, telling a crowd in Marseille "My name is not Azouz Sarkozy."

"He came down on me like a tonne of bricks," Begag writes in the book, excerpts of which appeared in this week's issue of the French magazine Marianne.

Begag says a furious Sarkozy called him on the telephone, yelling: "You're an asshole, a disloyal bastard! I'm going to smash your face."

"The interior minister told me, in a final threat, never to shake his hand again, or there would be trouble," he writes.

Begag's book is entitled "A sheep in the bathtub," in reference to televised comments in which Sarkozy suggested France needed to teach Muslim newcomers not to slaughter sheep in their homes.

A sociologist by training, Begag joined the government at the invitation of Sarkozy's bitter rival, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin.

Before standing down, Begag attacked Sarkozy's call for a "ministry of immigration and national identity" as an "indecent" bid to fish for votes among "the lost sheep of the far-right."

Sarkozy on Friday responded to Begag's claim that he had threatened him by saying: "I never said that to Azouz Begag for the simple reason that I never met him."

"What he says is a shameless lie," he said, adding that "frankly, he's going to a lot of trouble to make himself interesting."

The Socialist Party of Sarkozy's chief rival, Segolene Royal, seized on his resignation as "final proof of the divorce between Nicolas Sarkozy and French people of immigrant origin".

Maoists kill six in Jharkhand

AFP, Ranchi

Maoist guerrillas killed six people, including two paramilitary soldiers, in an ambush in eastern India, police said yesterday.

The rebels opened fire and hurled grenades and bombs at a police station in the late night attack Friday in Bokaro district, 140 kilometers from Jharkhand state capital Ranchi.

"Four civilians and two paramilitary personnel were killed. One soldier is missing," police official G.S Rath told AFP.

The exchange of gunfire between police and rebels lasted for more than four hours, the official said.

SECTARIAN CLASH

Death toll rises despite curfew in Pak town

AFP, Peshawar

Sectarian clashes continued despite a curfew in a remote northern Pakistani town yesterday, leaving at least eight people dead and 45 wounded in two days, officials said.

Authorities clamped down Friday after fighting broke out between Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Parachinar, 230 kilometres south of Peshawar, the capital of North West Frontier Province.

"Eight people have been killed and 45 are wounded in sporadic exchanges of mortars and gunfire between the rival groups," said Sahibzada Anees, head of the political administration of the area.

He said troops were patrolling the streets in the town nestled in the Hindu Kush mountains, which has a history of sectarian violence involving Shiite and Sunni communities.

Clashes between the two communities over a shrine last year left around 20 people dead.

Anees said trouble erupted on Friday after members of the Shiite community staged a demonstration outside their mosque against local Sunnis who allegedly chanted anti-Shiite slogans during a religious rally last week.



PHOTO: AFP

Hendrik Kegala (R) and Jady yesterday sit on a coral reef exposed by the force of the April 02 earthquake of 8.0 magnitude which lifted the Solomons island of Ranongga about three metres.

Solomons quake lifts an island metres from sea

AFP, Ranongga

The force of this week's Solomons earthquake has lifted an island in the South Pacific archipelago and pushed out its shoreline by tens of metres, exposing surrounding reefs.

The remote island of Ranongga in the western Solomon Islands used to have submerged coral reefs that attracted scuba divers from around the world.

She is the highest ranking US official to visit war-torn Somalia since 1994, the US embassy in Nairobi said.

Frazer arrived in the town of Baidoa, seat of the country's parliament, 250 kilometres northeast of the capital Mogadishu, local journalists said.

She went into talks with transitional president Abdullah Yusuf Ahmed and prime minister Ali Mohamed Guedi as Somali government troops and US security guards in civilian clothes provided tight protection.

tectonic plates triggered a tsunami that killed at least 34 people in the remote western Solomons and left 5,500 homeless.

Aid agencies have yet to reach Ranongga, but the AFP team saw the devastation that has permanently altered the geography of the island, 32-kilometres long and 8-kilometres wide.

Although Ranongga escaped the fury of the tsunami, the seismic upheaval from the quake pushed out the shoreline by up to 70 metres, local resident Hendrik Kegala also said.

"Plenty big noise," he told AFP in the local pidgin dialect.

"Water go back and not come back again," he added, saying the whooshing sound of the receding water and the shaking from the quake occurred simultaneously.

The loss of the reefs was a huge blow for the fishing communities that are dotted along Ranongga's coast, said Jackie Thomas, acting manager for

Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) in the Solomons.

"The fish from the reefs are the major source of protein for the villagers," she told AFP from the provincial capital Gizo.

"They use shells for tools and rely on the sea for many of their basic needs."

"It just shows the incredible force of the earthquake, to move a whole island."

She said the reefs around Ranongga were a protected marine environment and locals had worked hard with WWF in recent years to ensure that they were managed sustainably.

"Now it's another marine environment that has been destroyed," she said.

"Who knows if the coral reefs will recover and the fish will come back? Villagers will have to travel further to find the same sort of food and nutrition they've relied on -- the whole food chain has been disrupted."