

Youth Congress activists burn an effigy symbolising terrorism during a protest in New Delhi yesterday. India has been angered "as never before" by the attacks in Mumbai, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Friday, as his new home minister hinted at growing evidence of Pakistani involvement.

PHOTO: AFP

Peshawar blast toll rises to 27

AFP, Peshawar

Six more bodies have been found in the wreckage of a huge bomb blast that ripped through a crowded marketplace in northwest Pakistan, taking the toll to 27, police said yesterday.

An explosives-laden car blew up in a busy shopping area late Friday in the city of Peshawar, the capital of the violence-hit province bordering Afghanistan.

A 12-year-old boy was among the victims of the explosion, which hit the city as crowds of people were out shopping for the Muslim festival of Eid, and destroyed shops and hotels.

"We found six bodies buried under the debris of two destroyed hotels and one adjoining house. Among the dead was a 12-year-old boy and a woman," said local police official Noor Mohammad.

"The powerful blast brought down several buildings and destroyed over 50 vehicles in Peshawar's Qisakhawani bazaar."

The blast, which also wounded dozens of people, came hours after six people died in a car bomb explosion at a market in the semi-autonomous Orakzai tribal district near Peshawar.

The bombs were the latest in a wave of suicide and other attacks that have claimed more than 1,500 lives in the past 16 months.

Peshawar is close to Pakistan's semi-autonomous tribal zones, which border Afghanistan and where government forces have been battling pro-Taliban and Al-Qaeda-linked militants.

Landslide kills 10 at PNG gold mine

AFP, Port Moresby

At least 10 people have been killed in a mudslide at a gold mine camp in Papua New Guinea and rescuers are searching through the debris for more possible victims, the mine owners said yesterday.

The remote Kora exploration accommodation camp near Kainantu mine in the Eastern Highlands was hit by a torrent of mud triggered by heavy rains on Thursday evening, Barrick Gold Corporation said in a statement.

"Sadly, Barrick advises there have been 10 fatalities, all local villagers -- five of whom worked for the company and five who may have been travelling through the area from a nearby village food garden."

"This is a very tragic natural disaster that has directly affected our employees and the local community," said Joc O'Rourke, president of Barrick's Australia Pacific business unit.

Barrick is the world's biggest gold miner, with its headquarters in Canada and operations on five continents.

Early reports said up to 40 people could still be missing, but a Barrick spokeswoman told AFP the company believed all of its workers and nearby villagers had been accounted for.

"As far as we are aware there are no other community members missing, but that's not to say there weren't people from other villages in that place at the time of the incident," said Celina Watt.

"It's really important they go in with sniffer dogs -- we want to find them if there is anybody there."

Nepal's Maoists to discharge 3,000 child soldiers: UN

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoist prime minister has agreed to discharge around 3,000 child soldiers from the ranks of his party's former guerrilla army as quickly as possible, the United Nations said.

As part of a 2006 peace deal, the Maoists registered 30,000 people as fighters, but UN verification found that just 19,000 were genuine combatants, while 2,975 were under 18 by a May 2006 deadline.

"Prime Minister Pushpa

Kamal Dahal has expressed his commitment to release all the child soldiers from the UN-monitored camps as soon as possible," said Radhika Coomaraswamy, UN special representative for Children and Armed Conflict, on Friday.

Despite being found to be minors, the youngsters have remained in the camps since the peace deal that ended the bloody civil war in which 13,000 people were killed.

"We're hoping all the children will leave the camps by the end of February,"

Coomaraswamy told reporters in Kathmandu at the end of a six-day visit.

The Maoists now run Nepal after winning landmark elections in April, but little progress has been made for the rehabilitation of those who remain in 28 UN-monitored camps.

The Maoists insist their former fighters be allowed to join the Nepalese army, but their political opponents and the previously royalist military have said the national army cannot accept indoctrinated ex-guerrillas.

Lankan jets bomb LTTE targets as ground battles rage

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's air force staged a series of bombing raids against suspected Tamil Tiger targets as ground troops fought fierce battles on several fronts, defence ministry said yesterday.

Security forces, waging a massive offensive against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), have been facing stiff resistance in their march toward the northern rebel political capital of Kilinochchi, the ministry said.

"Air Force fighter jets launched three air strikes at LTTE strong points located in the west of Paranthan on Friday," the ministry said, referring to a town just north of Kilinochchi.

Government soldiers further north in the Jaffna peninsula clashed with Tiger rebels at

three locations on Friday, the ministry said.

Neither side gave details of casualties.

The latest confrontations came after the authorities claimed securing parts of a key highway running through rebel-held territory in the island's north.

The LTTE has admitted losing ground to government troops but their leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has vowed to fight on.

The guerrillas, who began their struggle for a separate Tamil homeland in 1972, are facing the Sri Lanka army's biggest-ever push to defeat the rebels militarily.

The battle zone is inaccessible to journalists and aid workers, meaning claims and counter-claims are impossible to verify independently.



PHOTO: AFP

US soldiers arrive at the scene of a suicide blast in the northern city of Kirkuk, some 225-km from Baghdad yesterday. One police man was killed and nine others were wounded in the suicide attack which targeted the entrance of a police academy in southwestern Kirkuk.

N Korea vows to exclude Japan from nuke talks

AFP, Seoul

North Korea said yesterday it would not recognise Japan as a member of six-nation nuclear disarmament talks due to resume next week as Tokyo refuses to provide its share of energy aid promised to Pyongyang.

"We will neither treat Japan as a party to the talks nor deal with it even if it impudently appears in the conference room, lost to shame," a foreign ministry spokesman was quoted by the official Korean Central News Agency saying.

The negotiations are scheduled to resume Monday in Beijing although China has not officially announced the date. The North's statement said only that the talks would resume "soon."

North Korea has frequently called for the exclusion of Japan from the forum, which

began meeting in August 2003. It was unclear what effect the latest announcement would have on negotiations.

Japan says it will not provide aid until the communist state accounts fully for Japanese nationals believed kidnapped by Pyongyang during the Cold War era.

North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Il has admitted his regime kidnapped Japanese to train its spies and in 2002 allowed five of them to return. It says the other abductees are dead but Japan believes they are alive and are barred from leaving because they know too many secrets.

Under a 2007 six-party pact, the North agreed to disable the facilities at its plutonium-producing Yongbyon nuclear complex and deliver a declaration of its nuclear activities.

In return it was to get one million tons of fuel oil or

energy aid of equivalent value. About half has so far been delivered. The United States has removed the North from a terrorism blacklist as promised under the pact.

The North said the main task of the six-party talks would be to speed up the aid delivery "and achieve common understanding of the issue of verification" of the nuclear declaration.

It complained that Japan "persistently and impudently insists on its participation in the talks though it is refusing to fulfil its commitment."

Tokyo's aim is to block denuclearisation to give it a pretext to boost its military power, the statement said.

"Such country has neither justification nor qualification to participate in the talks," it said, noting that other countries are willing to provide Japan's share of the aid.

UN chief frustrated over lack of democratic steps in Myanmar

AFP, United Nations

UN chief Ban Ki-moon on Friday voiced growing frustration at the failure by Myanmar's military regime to restore democracy and ruled out a return visit to the country at present.

After meeting with envoys of key countries seeking to foster dialogue between the military regime and its democratic opposition, Ban told reporters he sensed "not only high expectations but also growing frustration that our efforts have yet to yield the results we all hoped for."

"I share this sense of expectation and frustration," he added, noting he expected Myanmar rulers "to implement their commitments" regarding the release of political prisoners, including opposition leader and democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi.

"I urge the government of Myanmar to respond positively without further delay to

our specific suggestions," Ban said as he appealed to all countries to "use whatever available leverage and tools to impress on the government of Myanmar (the need) to implement their commitments."

The UN secretary general said he remained committed to pursuing his good offices role to bring about national reconciliation in Myanmar but ruled out a return visit in the immediate future.

"At this time I do not think that the atmosphere is ripe for me to undertake my own visit there," he said. "But I am committed, and I am ready to visit any time, whenever I can have reasonable expectations of my visit, to be productive and meaningful."

Ban made a lightning visit to the country in May after its military rulers came under international fire for not allowing foreign aid in after a cyclone left 138,000 people dead or missing.

The UN boss made the remarks Friday

after huddling with his so-called "group of friends on Myanmar."

The group comprises the five permanent members of the UN Security Council -- Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States -- as well as Australia, the European Union, India, Indonesia, Japan, Norway, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam.

On Wednesday, more than 100 former leaders wrote to the UN chief urging him to travel to Myanmar to secure the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

The prominent figures behind the letter include ex-US presidents George H.W. Bush and Jimmy Carter, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, ex-Australian premier John Howard, former French prime minister Lionel Jospin, former Japanese prime minister Junichiro Koizumi and ex-Philippine leaders Fidel Ramos and Corason Aquino.

Thaksin's ex-wife returns home

AP, Bangkok

The ex-wife of ousted Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra returned home on Friday, four months after she left the country following a conviction for tax evasion.

Pojaman Shinawatra arrived at Bangkok's international airport on a Thai Airways flight out of Hong Kong, said Immigration police chief Lt. Gen. Chatchawal Suksumjit.

"She cleared immigration like everyone else," he told The Associated Press.

Pojaman was out on bail and had appealed her conviction before leaving the country with her husband in July. "She was free to leave," Chatchawal said.

Thaksin has been expected to return to Thailand for an August 11 court hearing but instead sent a letter from London saying he and his wife had fled to the UK because they feared Thai courts were biased against them.

Pojaman and Thaksin, a multimillionaire former telecoms tycoon, were reported to be living comfortably in exile in London until Britain revoked their visas. A week later, the couple divorced at the Thai consulate in Hong Kong on Nov. 14, a development that caught Thais by surprise.

Many Thais speculated the divorce was a strategy to protect the family's vast assets, which are mostly held in Pojaman's name.

Arisman Pongraengrong, a Thaksin ally, said Pojaman came back to Thailand to "settle legal and financial matters" following her divorce.

The tax evasion case against Pojaman is among several corruption lawsuits brought against Thaksin and his family. He contends the suits are part of a political vendetta.

17 killed in Manila shootout: Police

AFP, Manila

Up to 17 people, including four bystanders, were killed in a police shootout with armed men toting assault rifles and a grenade launcher in a Manila suburb, police and news reports said.

Metro Manila police chief Leopoldo Bataoil said the shoot-out took place as police were following a gang on their way to rob a warehouse in the suburb of Paranaque late Friday.

"They appear to have gone berserk after discovering they were surrounded. They fired left and right at police who were trying to block them," using grenade launchers and rifles, Bataoil said.

As well as the 10 robbers and four bystanders, one policeman and two security guards were also killed in the gunfight, Bataoil added. An eight-year-old girl was among the fatalities, he said.

Three other policemen were wounded.

Three of the gunmen were seen fleeing in a car they commandeered from a civilian, Bataoil added.

Bataoil described the suspects as members of a notorious gang believed to be behind a rash of armed bank robberies. The gang is known for wearing bullet-proof vests and uniforms, disguising themselves as members of the police SWAT team.

Two grenade launchers, four assault rifles, two pistols and two hand grenades were recovered from the suspects.

Human rights commissioner Lilia de Lima said her

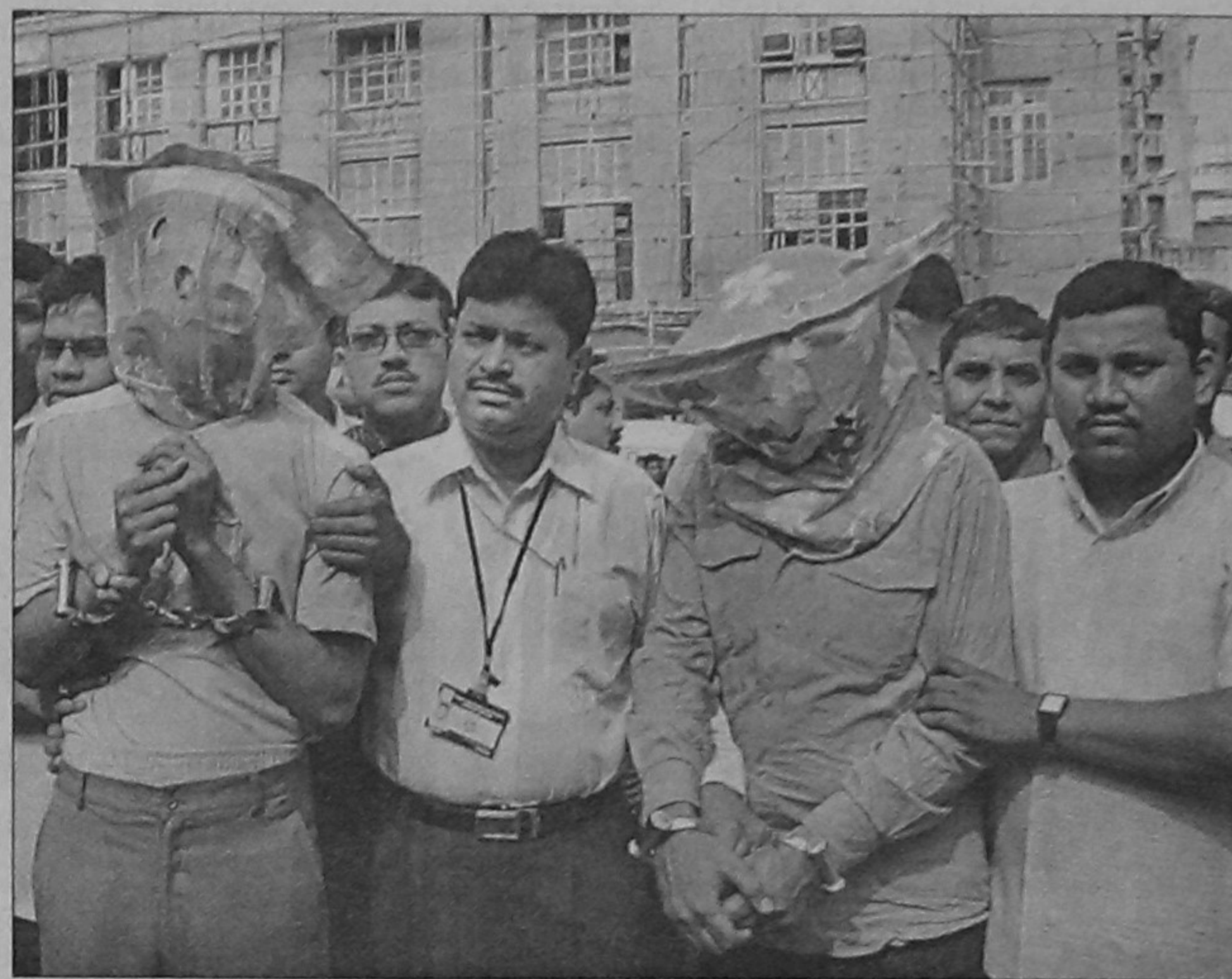


PHOTO: AFP

Two Indian men, Tousif Rahman (2L) and Sheikh Muktar (2R), arrested for allegedly providing SIM cards to the terrorists in the Mumbai attacks, are paraded outside Lalbazar Police Station in Kolkata yesterday.

India pledges to open up N-sector to pvt players

AFP, New Delhi

India's government has pledged to open up its nuclear sector to private players -- once it completes bilateral civil nuclear cooperation pacts.

The statement late Friday came after Indian Premier Manmohan Singh signed a landmark nuclear deal with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev earlier in the day covering the building of four new nuclear energy reactors in India.

"Once negotiations with Russia and possibly Canada in

nuclear commerce talks are done with, the government will soon open up the sector for private players to participate," Science and Technology Minister Kapil Sibal said.

He was speaking in New Delhi at a government-organised technology summit.

The four new nuclear energy reactors will be built in Kudankulam in southern Tamil Nadu state, where Moscow is already building two 1,000-megawatt light water reactors.

The value of the new deal, signed in New Delhi, was not given.

The nuclear deal with Russia was the third such agreement India has signed after a decision in September by the Nuclear Suppliers


Group to waive its ban on the trading of atomic technology with New Delhi.

The United States and France are the other powers to have signed agreements with New Delhi but former Cold War ally Russia remains so far the only state actively involved in building reactors in the energy-hungry country.

A host of private companies such as Westinghouse Electric Co and General Electric of the United States have been jockeying for a slice of India's lucrative civilian nuclear technology market.

The end to India's nuclear pariah status has paved the way for atomic fuel and technology sales worth tens of billions of dollars and companies are racing to exploit the market, industry officials say.

ভাল মানুষ, যোগ্য নেতা যতই বন্ধু লোকে
জানতে হবে প্রার্থী কেমন আইন-কানুনের চোখে



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ব্যবস্থাপনা: সফিকুর ও প্রবালনা অধিকার