



Pakistani police and volunteers inspect the debris of a destroyed law enforcement building after a car bomb attack in Lahore yesterday. The bomb devastated Pak offices used to interrogate suspected militants, killing 13 people in the latest attack to strike the country's teeming cultural capital.

PHOTO: AFP

Blast hits Pak police building: 13 killed

Laden's close aide arrested in Karachi

AP, AFP, INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Lahore/Karachi

A suicide car bomber struck a building where police interrogate high-value suspects in Pakistan's eastern city of Lahore yesterday, killing at least 13 people and wounding 61 more including women taking children to school, officials said.

Pakistan's Taliban faction claimed responsibility for the attack after the bomber tried to ram a car packed with up to 600 kilograms (1,300 pounds) of explosives into the investigations unit in the country's second largest city.

The attack broke what had been a relative lull in major violence in Pakistan, a nuclear-armed country reviled by some militant groups for its alliance with the US. It also showed that insurgents retain the ability to strike the country's heartland, far from the Afghan border regions where al-Qaeda and the Taliban have long thrived, despite army offensives aimed at

wiping them out.

No group immediately claimed responsibility, but suspicion fell on the Pakistani Taliban and allied militant groups. Those groups are believed responsible for a wave of attacks that killed more than 600 people starting in October, including several in major Pakistani cities. More recent attacks have been smaller and confined to remote northwest regions near Afghanistan.

The bomb blast Monday comes amid reports of a Pakistani crackdown on Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives using its soil.

In the latest case, dreaded terrorist Osama bin Laden's close aide and a top al-Qaeda leader was arrested from the outskirts of Pakistan's southern port city Karachi.

Pakistani security forces with the help of US intelligence arrested Abu Yahya Mujahdeen al-Adam, who was a close associate of Osama Bin Laden and included in the CIA's list of ten most

wanted terrorists.

Abu Yahya was arrested Sunday and has been shifted to Islamabad for further investigation, the DawnNews reported, quoting sources.

The militant was believed to have been living with Osama bin Laden after September 11, 2001 attacks in New York.

Pennsylvania-born Abu Yahya is a US citizen and assumed to be a commander of foreign militants fighting in Afghanistan, the report said.

Earlier among the militants said to have been arrested is the Afghan Taliban's No. 2 commander, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar.

The explosion went off outside a Punjab province police building, police official Zulfikar Hameed said. TV footage showed a huge crater in the ground where the blast seemed to have originated. It appeared the suicide bomber rammed a car packed with as much as 1,300 pounds (600 kilograms) of explosives into the building's perimeter wall, officials said.

India issues terror alert for Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore

PTI, New Delhi

The Home Ministry today issued an alert for Mumbai, Kolkata and Bangalore saying the three major cities could be targeted by terrorists.

Based on the interrogation of suspected Indian Mujahideen terrorist Salman Ahmed, the Home Ministry asked governments of Maharashtra, West Bengal and Karnataka to take all possible steps to foil any bid by terrorists to strike the cities.

"We are not taking any chances on whatever information we have received. So, we have alerted the concerned state governments to take all necessary security measures immediately," a Home Ministry official said.

During his interrogation, Salman, who was suspected to be involved in serial blasts in Ahmedabad, Varanasi and Gorakhpur, confessed that the Indian Mujahideen has set up bases in Karachi, Kathmandu, Dubai and a few places in Middle East under its so-called "Karachi Project".

Terrorists may try to attack the airports at peak hours so that they are able to inflict "maximum damage", the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) warned Monday, pointing to changing strategies.

"They (terrorists) may now try to attack the airports at peak hours from the frontal side so that they are able to inflict maximum damage... we keep on taking all these factors into our planning and it is for this reason we have got deployed on the city side at bigger airports," CISF Additional Director General (Airport sector) MS Bali told reporters.

Indian parliament in deadlock over women's quota bill

AFP, New Delhi

An attempt by India's government to pass legislation reserving a third of all seats for women in parliament failed yesterday as politicians opposed to the draft law forced repeated adjournments.

The government had been confident that the Women Reservation Bill, which has been stalled for 14 years, would gather the required votes to pass in the upper house on Monday after being presented on International Women's Day.

The house was adjourned several times as MPs from socialist parties shouted slogans, refused to allow the introduction of the proposed legislation and at one point tore up the draft bill and hurled it at the speaker.

The ruling Congress party, and the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have pledged their support in public.

The detractors argue the law, which would reserve a third of seats for women in the parliament and state assemblies, would lead to a monopoly by upper-caste women at the expense of lower caste and religious minority Muslims.

"We are not anti-women but we want reservations for women hailing from minority and

backward classes first," Mulayam Singh Yadav, a leader of the pro-Muslim Samajwadi (Socialist) party said outside parliament.

The Congress said it was adamant it would bring in the law.

"The bill is a subject where the only question is when and not if. It is an idea whose time has come," Congress spokesman Abhishek Singhvi said, lashing out at MPs who tore papers and screamed slogans in parliament.

Attempts to pass the bill over the last decade and a half have been blocked by various political groups who have demanded separate quotas for women from Muslim and low-caste communities.

Yadav said the draft law was an attempt by the Congress and the BJP to appease the rich and the influential upper class.

The thorny proposal to reserve 33 percent of seats, first introduced in parliament in 1996, would increase women's membership in both houses where they now occupy about one in 10 seats.

Because the bill involves a constitutional change, it needs the approval of two-thirds of legislators in the upper house after which it will go before the elected lower house where it also requires a majority of the same margin.



National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) General Secretary Annie Raja (R) gestures as she requests Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) president Lalu Prasad Yadav to support the "Women's Reservation Bill" outside parliament in New Delhi yesterday. An attempt by India's government to pass legislation reserving a third of seats in the national parliament for women provoked uproar Monday as opposition politicians forced repeated adjournments.

PHOTO: AFP

India pushes Lanka for Tamil reconciliation

AFP, Colombo

Indian foreign secretary Nirupama Rao urged Sri Lanka's leaders to open a new era of stability after the island's civil war by bringing minority Tamils into mainstream society, officials said yesterday.

Rao, on a visit to Colombo, told President Mahinda Rajapakse that the defeat of Tamil Tiger separatist rebels last year could lead to a lasting solution to decades of ethnic conflict.

Sri Lanka had "a historic opportunity to initiate a process of political reconciliation where all communities in Sri Lanka can live in peace and harmony," Rao said in a statement.

Meanwhile, India's external intelligence agency tried to undermine Sri Lanka's President Mahinda Rajapakse at polls in January and wanted him defeated, a minister said in an interview published Monday.

Nandana Goonathilake, minister of postal services, said the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's foreign intelligence service, had worked against Rajapakse at the January 26 vote even though the Indian government publicly supported him.

"How the RAW operates and the way that the government of India operates are sometimes very different," Goonathilake told the Daily Mirror newspaper in an interview.

"This is why I said though the Indian government was for President Rajapakse, particular (RAW) officials worked against him," he added, without elaborating.

His remarks came as India's Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao was in Colombo, the highest level visit since Rajapakse won reelection, to discuss post-war politics and reconciliation in the island.

Rajapakse came to power in 2005 promising to address Tamil demands for greater autonomy, but he later ordered the massive military offensive that crushed the Tigers.

Since then, the president has publicly committed himself to reconciliation though he has yet to implement recommendations of an all-party panel he set up to address grievances of the ethnic Tamil minority.

UN offices in Islamabad receive terror threats

ANI, Islamabad

The United Nations has requested the Pakistan government to deploy additional police and paramilitary personnel to guard their Islamabad offices in the wake of two recent terror threats.

A letter sent by the UN's resident coordinator in Pakistan to the ministry of foreign affairs identifies 15 offices in different parts of the city that require extra protection, The Dawn reports.

According to sources, the agency has suggested that the deployments could be on a temporary basis.

In recent months, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry has repeatedly warned diplomatic missions to exercise extra vigilance in view of the security situation obtaining in the country.

On their part, the authorities have already enhanced security around the missions.



US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates (R) talks with US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry as he arrives in Kabul yesterday. Gates warned of "hard fighting" still ahead despite signs of progress in the eight-year war against Taliban insurgents.

PHOTO: AFP

Kandahar offensive to wait for more troops

Gates in Kabul warns of tough fight ahead

AP, AFP, Kabul

The top US general in Afghanistan says that an upcoming campaign to secure the city of Kandahar is still some time away.

Without being specific, Gen. Stanley McChrystal says the Kandahar operation will wait for a larger US and Nato troop buildup over the next couple of months. The bulk of additional forces expected for the region will be in place by early summer.

The Kandahar operation is perhaps the most anticipated military effort of the war as President Barack Obama has redesigned it. The recent operation round the town of Marjah (MAR'-jah) was a small-scale rehearsal for Kandahar, home base for the Taliban.

The top US general in Afghanistan says the military campaign around the southern Afghan town of Marjah

could have been faster, but the cost in civilian casualties would have been too high.

Gen Stanley McChrystal says the Marjah campaign could be over in one night. Instead active military operations to rout the Taliban took about three weeks.

McChrystal spoke Monday with reporters travelling with US Defence Secretary Robert Gates in Afghanistan.

The military counts 19 Afghan civilian deaths from errant military action during the Marjah campaign.

Meanwhile, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates held talks in Kabul yesterday, warning of "hard fighting" ahead as his ground commander said Nato could take on the Taliban in their spiritual capital this summer.

"There is no doubt there are positive developments going on, but I would say it's very early yet," Gates told reporters on his plane before landing in the Afghan capital

in order to review US-led efforts to beat back the Taliban.

He cautioned that there would be "some very hard fighting, very hard days ahead" as US, Nato and Afghan forces step up pressure on Taliban militants in the south under a last-ditch strategy designed to end the war.

Gates acknowledged "bits and pieces of good news" when asked about the recent capture of senior Taliban leaders in neighbouring Pakistan, but said it was probably too soon to say momentum had shifted to coalition forces.

"I think more needs to be done," he said, adding that a surge of US reinforcements was still in its initial stages.

About 6,000 of the 30,000 additional troops pledged by President Barack Obama in December have arrived in Afghanistan, Gates said, with the rest due to deploy by the end of August.

Grabbers feast on Cox's Bazar hills

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using the banner of freedom fighters. Hasina paid no attention to them and asked the workers to continue the work.

Md Shahjahan of Muktijoddha Sangsad said there was a separate housing proposal for freedom fighters and it was now under consideration of the government.

The image of freedom fighters would be tarnished if their names were exploited for land grabbing. The government's reputation will be on the line too.

Shahjahan added Hasina Begum was never involved with Muktijoddha Sangsad.

However, Hasina said the land was proposed to be used for Bangladesh Freedom Fighters Rehabilitation Society during the four party-led government's rule.

"There is a conspiracy to grab the land. We are just taking control of the land. In

it there is nothing to tarnish the image of freedom fighters or the government," she said.

Sajed Ali, president of Class-III Employees Association at Cox's Bazar district collectorate office, said, "The proposed land for Bangladesh Freedom Fighters Rehabilitation Society is about one and a half kilometres away from this piece of land now being grabbed. It is indeed allocated for Government Officers-Employees Housing Project. There is a High Court stay order against building any structures on the land."

Local freedom fighters, government employees and the grabbers had been locked in an altercation for about two hours. Forest Department officials reached the spot around 5:00pm and demolished the houses built there.

Cox's Bazar Divisional Forest Officer Saidul Islam

confirmed the incident and said whoever the owner, nobody has any right to cut or grab hill.

Sources said more than 1,000 dwelling houses and business firms have been built on about 700 acres of Forest Department's land in different places including Kolatoli, Larpara, Bus Terminal, Pahartoli, Bypass Road, district jail and City College areas. At least one lakh people are living in those houses.

A forest official requesting anonymity said the grabbers could not be evicted from the hills even after filing more than 50 cases against them. Many grabbers have obtained stay order from High Court against eviction.

Cox's Bazar municipality Mayor Sarwar Kamal said, the Bakkhali River has become unfit for use due to indiscriminate hill cutting. Engine boats, which earlier

plied across the river, now cannot use the route due to emerging chasms following silt storage in the riverbed.

The earth from hill cutting came down the drains and caused water stagnation, he added.

Md Rafiqul Islam, an official of Directorate of Environment at Cox's Bazar, said under the Bangladesh Environment Act, construction of illegal structures and cutting of hills are banned in the sea beach and adjoining ecologically endangered areas.

Cox's Bazar Superintendent of Police Gias Uddin admitted that different groups under different banners were grabbing land in the district. A few of them have been evicted recently, he added.

Transaction alert

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The government last year passed Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2009 and Anti-terrorism Act 2009.

The circular defined "politically exposed foreign nationals" as any head of the state or government, politicians, government officials, military or judicial officers or high-ups of state-owned corporations.

It said approval from higher authorities is obligatory for such people to open accounts and the sources of their wealth have to be clarified. Besides, transactions of their accounts must be monitored regularly.

All banks have been asked to examine the background of all prospective candidates to prevent anyone involved in militant activities from getting appointed, said the BB official.

Gender unfair laws to go

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leader of the House and five female cabinet members, she said in future, deputy speaker and speaker of parliament would be made from women.

"We will eradicate gender discrimination from Bangladesh by 2021, the golden jubilee of the country's independence," said she.

Sheikh Hasina paid rich tribute to the women violated and killed during the Liberation War in 1971 and recalled those who made tremendous sacrifices for women development across the globe.

The prime minister urged mothers to give equal attention to their sons and daughters since discrimination sparks from within the family.

Imploring men to play a more responsible role in establishing women rights in every segment of the society,

Hasina said, "Just for once, think how women contribute to families. They look after the household, the children and their education."

She said, "In a family, the mother is the last one to go to bed and the first one to rise while she relentlessly works until midnight."

Sufferings of a working mother are even greater. She has to do all the works at home and then at workplace enduring social and economic discrimination silently, she said.

Hasina also called for dormitories and day-care facilities for workingwomen and their children.

She said woman and child trafficking, acid pitching, early marriage, dowry and family repression must stop. A united effort can save women from such inhumane acts.

The premier said she

talked to the neighbouring countries on taking effective steps to protect women and children from illegal trafficking.

"Remember, some things cannot be achieved by formulating laws," she noted, adding that women's problems are not theirs only, rather of their families' and the society's.

With Minister for Women and Children Affairs Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury in the chair, the inaugural function was also addressed by Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on the ministry Meher Afroz Chumki and acting secretary of the Ministry Razia Begum.

At the function the prime minister also released a postal stamp of Tk 5 and an envelope worth Tk 6 on the occasion of International Women's Day' 2010.