

US warns of terror strikes in Delhi

BBC ONLINE

The US has issued a travel alert saying that there are "increased indications" that "terrorists" are planning attacks in the Indian capital, Delhi.

The alert listed some popular shopping areas and advised Americans travelling or residing in India to be vigilant.

Delhi police chief YS Yadav told Reuters that "threats are there", and the police were "wide awake" to it.

The alert came after bombs exploded at the weekend outside a cricket stadium in the southern city of Bangalore.

The US advisory mentioned Chandni Chowk, Connaught Place, Greater Kailash, Karol Bagh and Mehrauli as places which are "attractive targets for terrorist groups".

Australia has also put out an advisory warning tourists to avoid the same areas.

Most of these places contain busy, crowded markets, which are popular with locals and foreigners alike.

Afghan refugee children wave from a truck at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registration centre on the outskirts of Peshawar yesterday prior to their departure for their homeland Afghanistan. About 1.7 million Afghan refugees remain in Pakistan after fleeing civil war and Taliban rule in their homeland.

PHOTO: AFP



Early Afghan pullout would be worse than 9/11: Merkel

AFP, Berlin

Pulling out of Afghanistan too soon would be "far more disastrous" than 9/11 because of the danger of extremists getting hold of nuclear materials, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said yesterday.

"The international community went in together, and we will pull out together. If we do not then the consequences, I am convinced, would be far more disastrous than the results of the September 11, 2001 attacks," Merkel said.

"Just looking at the map makes this clear. Right next door to Afghanistan is nuclear-armed Pakistan, and we have to assume that another neighbour, Iran, is also doing everything it can to become a nuclear power," she said.

In a spirited defence of the deeply unpopular mission following the deaths of seven German soldiers this month, Merkel noted that a recent international conference had agreed "nuclear terrorism is one of the world's biggest security dangers."

US denies role in Benazir's killing

PTI, Islamabad

The US yesterday dismissed as "false" and "outrageous" the allegations made by former Inter-Services Intelligence agency chief Hamid Gul that the United States government was involved in the assassination of former premier Benazir Bhutto.

Noting that Gul had "repeatedly asserted the outrageous and baseless claim" during appearances on two TV news channels, a spokesman for the US embassy said, "The US rejects this and other false allegations regularly made by Lt Gen (retired) Gul about its policies and activities."

The spokesman said that at the time of Bhutto's murder in December 2007, the US "swiftly and publicly condemned" the act and called for an independent investigation.

Detained Fonseka attends parliament

Jayarathne sworn in as prime minister

BBC ONLINE

Defeated Sri Lankan presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka has been released from detention to appear in the opening session of parliament.

The general, who is being court martialled, called for the "rule of law" in an attack on his arch-rival, President Mahinda Rajapakse.

His comments were his first remarks in public since his detention on 8 February on corruption charges.

He travelled under escort from military custody to take up his seat.

Gen Fonseka fell out with the president after the defeat of Tamil Tigers rebels last May.

He was beaten by Rajapakse in presidential elections of January 2010.

JAYARATHNE AS PRIME MINISTER

Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse has appointed one of his party's elder statesmen as

prime minister.

DM Jayarathne, a former teacher in his 70s, was sworn in on Wednesday. MPs will choose a new Speaker yesterday.

Rajapakse is working out who will be in his new cabinet after final official results confirmed his alliance had won a landslide in parliamentary elections.

The result was delayed for nearly two weeks because of re-polls in some areas hit by violence the first time round.

"What the country needs is democracy, rule of law, personal freedoms and media freedom," Gen Fonseka told members of parliament attending a swearing-in ceremony for the body's 225 lawmakers.

During the ceremony, he and other party heads were permitted to offer congratulations to its new speaker - Chamal Rajapakse, the president's brother.

Gunmen kill Pak politician

19 militants, one soldier killed

BBC ONLINE, AFP, Peshawar

Gunmen have killed a former member of parliament and three other men in an attack on their vehicle in northern Pakistan's volatile Charsadda district.

Alamzeb Omarzai was Charsadda's MP from 2002 to 2008. Since then he has been a member of a group linked to the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) on it, a local police official told the BBC.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's security forces yesterday killed 19 militants, while one soldier also died in fighting in the northwest, a bastion of Taliban and al-Qaeda-linked fighters, officials said.

Troops used heavy artillery to target suspected insurgent bases in two villages in the tribal district of Orakzai.

Extending weekend, Pakistan plans to tackle power deficit

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's prime minister yesterday announced a radical plan to tackle the nation's debilitating energy shortages, including extending the weekend and banning all-night wedding parties.

Daily power cuts hit homes throughout the country, with some Pakistanis in rural areas without electricity for most of the day, fuelling discontent, crippling industry and triggering violent protests.

Pakistan is able to produce only about 80 percent of its required electricity, officials have said, a crisis blamed on soaring demand, debt, a lack of investment, corruption and a creaking distribution system.

A raft of new measures, effective immediately, was announced after a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, who said the plan would save 500 megawatts of electricity per day across the country.

"Never before in the history of Pakistan has such a conference been held with participation of all provincial chief ministers and other stakeholders, showing that all are on board to resolve the energy crisis," Gilani said.

In an effort to curb electricity usage, markets will be ordered to close at 8:00pm, government offices banned from using air conditioning before 11:00am, and lavish wedding celebrations ordered to last no more than three hours.



'Talk of Iran fuel sanctions a joke'

AFP, Tehran

Plans by world powers to choke off fuel supplies to gasoline-thirsty Iran is a "joke," Iranian oil minister Masoud Mirkazemi said yesterday.

"This talk of imposing sanctions on gasoline has become a joke," Mirkazemi told reporters on the sidelines of Iran's annual international oil exhibition being held in Tehran.

Rajapakse's brother elected new speaker

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Colombo

One of President Mahinda Rajapakse's brothers was selected as the new speaker of Sri Lanka's parliament Thursday, a day after official results confirmed a solid victory for the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA).

Chamal Rajapakse, 67, the president's older brother and a former minister of ports and aviation was unanimously elected in the inaugural session.

The president's younger brother, Basil, his son Namal and cousin Nirupama Rajapakse are also among the 144 UPFA parliamentarians in the 225-seat assembly.

The elections were held April 8, but due to a re-poll in two districts following allegations of malpractices the final results were released only Wednesday.



In this handout picture provided by the Sri Lankan President's Office, President Mahinda Rajapakse gifts a shawl to his newly elected Member of Parliament son Namal Rajapakse in Colombo yesterday. The younger Rajapakse equalled a record held by his father as the youngest lawmaker by winning a seat at the age of 24.

PHOTO: AFP

Maoists in India gaining strength

AFP, Raipur

The top policeman in the Maoist rebel bastion of Chhattisgarh warned yesterday that the insurgents were gaining strength in the central Indian state.

Police director general Vishwa Ranjan told AFP that at least 1,300 left-wing insurgents were operating in and around Chhattisgarh, the worst-hit state where 76 policemen were massacred earlier this month.

"They have upgraded their warfare capabilities," the officer said in an interview in which he conceded that the guerrillas had gained the upper hand in eight of the state's 19 districts.

He said the rebels had organised themselves into military-style platoons of 33 fighters each.

Some of the platoons had been dispatched to nearby insurgency-ridden states of Maharashtra, Orissa, Jharkhand and West Bengal to scale up violence.

Flights take off but ash limits Norway, Sweden

AP, Brussels

European airports sent thousands of planes into the sky yesterday after a week of unprecedented disruptions, but shifting winds sent a new plume of volcanic ash over Scandinavia, forcing some airports in Norway and Sweden to close again.

The new airspace restrictions applied to northern Scotland and parts of southern Norway, Sweden and Finland, said Kyla Evans, spokeswoman for Eurocontrol, the European air traffic agency.

But nearly all of the continent's 28,000 other scheduled flights, including more than 300 flights on lucrative transatlantic routes, were going ahead. Every plane was packed, however, as airlines squeezed in some of the hundreds of thousands of travellers who had been stranded for days among passengers with regular Thursday tickets.

Airlines said there was no quick solution to cut down the backlog of passengers, for most flights were nearly full anyway and no other planes were available.

"Quite frankly we don't have an answer to this," said David Henderson, spokesman for the Association of European Airlines.

Some travellers got a break. Authorities chartered a luxury cruise ship the *Celebrity Eclipse* to pick up 2,200 tourists in the northern Spanish port of Bilbao on Thursday and bring them back to England. A British Royal Navy ship also arrived in Portsmouth, southern England, carrying 440 troops coming home from Afghanistan and 280 civilians back from Santander, Spain.

Saarc Summit

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Secretary in Kathmandu said Nepal would push for an effective regional mechanism to cope with the climate change. Bangladesh and Maldives are also likely to support Nepal's effort to set up a regional body, as both the countries will face the most drastic effects of climate change.

Meanwhile, Bhutan has finished all the necessary preparations for hosting the summit, which will mark the 25th year of the establishment of the regional body in Dhaka in 1985.

Foreign ministry officials in Dhaka said the summit is expected to sign three pacts -- the Saarc Agreement on Disaster Response Mechanism, the Convention on Cooperation on Environment and Climate Change, and the Agreement on Trade in Services.

The other issues likely to be taken up would be energy

and food crisis and the effective implementation of Saarc Development Fund (SDF). The permanent secretariat of SDF with initial fund of \$300 million will also be inaugurated during the summit.

Regional issues like terrorism, extremism, early implementation of South Asian Free Trade Agreement, and expansion of tourism in the region will figure in the meet, according to officials.

Observers from China, Japan, the European Union, Republic of Korea, the United States, Australia, Mauritius and Iran will attend the summit.

The 2-day summit will be preceded by the Council of Ministers meeting on April 27, Standing Committee meeting of the Foreign Secretaries April 25-26 and Programming Committee meeting of senior officials on April 24.

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know that on the basis of information from some ministries and departments, public representatives, political activists and voters in the constituency are being arrested just two days before the by-polls.

"Such pre-emptive arrest without directive from of the commission is unlawful. However, law enforcement agencies' members engaged in election duties must take legal actions against people involved in activities disrupting law and order," the EC letter said.

Talking to journalists yesterday at the EC Secretariat, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hossain said everything would be under the commission's control till the polling is over.

Directive from any ministry or department will not be taken into consideration, he asserted.

Meanwhile, a BNP delegation at a meeting with the EC yesterday alleged that police are harassing local leaders and workers of the party in Bhola-3 forcing many of them to leave the constituency.

They demanded that the EC

'Pre-emptive'

take steps to ensure a congenial atmosphere for voters so that they can freely go to polling stations tomorrow and cast votes without any intimidation.

The three-member delegation led by BNP standing committee member Nazrul Islam Khan alleged that ruling Awami League (AL) men are snatching national identity cards of voters in Char Zahiruddin area to force them to vote for the AL candidate.

At the meeting, the BNP team however did not demand deferral of the by-polls by a week while party candidate Major (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed made the demand on Wednesday.

"We did not discuss deferral of the polls," Nazrul told journalists later.

Replying to a question, he said the BNP candidate might have raised the demand considering the situation in the constituency, and recovery of illegal arms.

Meanwhile, Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Husein said everything in Bhola-3 is under control, and the polls must be held in a free and fair manner.

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Tejgaon link road

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will now slowdown heavy traffic on Mohakhali-Moghbazar road as well.

"It has brought an additional mess and the accumulated effect is what we are facing now," he said.

"But any such further intervention must be thought in integration with the proposed metro line and elevated expressway," he said.

A traffic police in Tejgaon area said the link road has added more waiting time for traffic from all three directions -- Farmgate, Jahangir Gate and Bijoy Sarani -- at Bijoy Sarani intersection.

Vehicles from Farmgate is allotted 120 seconds to pass the intersection, those from Jahangir Gate get 110 seconds and the ones from Bijoy Sarani direction have 90 seconds.

However, quite often vehicles have to wait eight minutes rather than five and a half to cross the intersection.

The dual carriageway link road cannot adequately accommodate the waiting traffic and vehicles get stuck behind long queues, he said.

The link road is 1,114 metres long and 60 feet wide.