

Car bomb scares Times Square in NY

AFP, New York

Police found an "amateurish" but potentially powerful bomb that apparently began to detonate but did not explode in a smoking sport utility vehicle in Times Square, authorities said yesterday.

Thousands of tourists were cleared from the streets for 10 hours after a T-shirt vendor alerted police to the suspicious vehicle, which contained three propane tanks, fireworks, two filled 5-gallon gasoline containers, and two clocks with batteries, electrical wire and other components, Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly said.

"We avoided what we could have been a very deadly event," Mayor Michael Bloomberg said. "It certainly could have exploded and had a pretty big fire and a decent amount of explosive impact."

The bomb appeared to be starting to detonate but malfunctioned, top police spokesman Paul Browne told The New York Times and Wall Street Journal. Browne did not immediately return an e-mail to the AP seeking confirmation.

Fire-fighters who arrived shortly after the first call heard a popping sound, said Fire Commissioner Sal Cassano, who described the sound as not quite an explosion.

"I think the intent was to cause a significant ball of fire," Kelly said.

No suspects were in custody, though Kelly said a surveillance video showed the car driving west on 45th Street before it parked between Seventh and Eighth avenues. Police were looking for more video from office buildings that weren't open at the time.

"The full attention of city, state and federal law enforcement will be turned to bringing the guilty party to justice in this act of terrorism," Gov. David Paterson said in a statement. Bloomberg did not describe it as terrorism.

The T-shirt vendor alerted police at about 6:30 pm, the height of dinner hour before theatregoers head to Saturday night shows.

Smoke was coming from the back of the dark-coloured Pathfinder, its hazard lights were on and "it was just sitting there," said Rallis Gialaboukis, 37, another vendor who has hawked his wares for 20 years across the street.



PHOTO: AFP

Police stand by at sunrise at the scene where a car bomb had been parked at 45th Street and 7th Avenue in Times Square yesterday in New York. Police found a crude but potentially powerful bomb in a vehicle in Times Square and disabled it, clearing out the famous intersection of thousands of tourists on a busy Saturday night.

A white robotic police arm broke windows of the SUV to remove any explosive materials. A Connecticut license plate on the vehicle did not match up, Bloomberg said. Police interviewed the Connecticut car owner, who told them he had sent the plates to a nearby junkyard, Bloomberg said.

Heavily armed police and emergency vehicles shut down the city's busiest streets, choked with taxis and people on one of the first summer-like days of the year. Times Square lies about four traffic-choked miles north of where terrorists bombed the World Trade Centre in 1993, then laid

waste to it on Sept. 11, 2001.

The car was parked on one of the prime blocks for Broadway shows, with seven theatres housing such big shows as "The Lion King" and "Billy Elliot."

The curtain at "God of Carnage" and "Red"

UK ELECTION 2010

Leaders in renewed push for votes

BBC ONLINE

The three main party leaders are all campaigning hard, each seeking to gain precious ground as the election battle enters its final few days.

David Cameron said difficult decisions would be needed on spending cuts but insisted a Tory government, if elected, would protect frontline services.

Touring London seats, Gordon Brown told supporters "fairness is in your DNA".

And Nick Clegg urged people to break a habit of voting Labour and switch their allegiance to the Liberal Democrats.

As the latest opinion polls suggest that although the Conservative lead is holding firm or even increasing, a hung Parliament still remains possible, Cameron said the Tories had now got "momentum" in the run up to polling day on 6 May.

He said that if elected, the Conservatives would have to make some "very difficult and

tough decisions" on government spending.

Speaking to the BBC's Andrew Marr show, he said while future budget cuts could be "incredibly challenging", the Tories would protect frontline services and the "neediest".

Where the Conservatives differ from Labour and the Liberal Democrats is that they intend to immediately find government savings of £6bn if elected, saying it is essential to start tacking the UK's public deficit straight away.

Both the other two main parties do not propose to start putting reductions in place until the start of the next financial year in April 2011, warning that to do so this year could risk a "double dip" recession.

Cameron told Andrew Marr that while a Conservative government would have to go on and find savings above this figure to trim the deficit, he did not accept that his party had only revealed 20% of their plans so far.

"I have said very clearly, it isn't possible to explain everything that needs to be done from a position of opposition," he said.

NPT MEET

Ahmadinejad leaves for US

AFP, Tehran

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad left Tehran yesterday to attend the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference in New York, the foreign ministry spokesman told state television.

"The Islamic republic's delegation headed by Dr Ahmadinejad left for New York this morning to participate in the NPT review meeting," spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast was quoted as saying on state television's website.

"The president will take part in the conference to defend the rights of Iranian people and all nations," he said, adding the hardliner will "frankly inform all about the Iranian nation's position."

Mehmanparast said Ahmadinejad will make a speech Monday when the NPT review conference begins.

Thai PM says no plans for martial law

Cabinet holds emergency meeting on crisis

AP, AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's prime minister said yesterday that he had no plans to declare martial law despite growing demands the government take firmer measures to end protests that have paralysed parts of Bangkok for seven weeks.

In a small concession, the demonstrators yesterday shifted their tire barricades away from a hospital on the edge of their encampment in a move intended to allow the medical facility to reopen.

Thailand's cabinet held an emergency meeting Sunday on how to quell the long-running standoff with anti-government "Red Shirts" in Bangkok amid fears it could spiral into further violence.

Government spokesman Panitan Wattanayagorn said the meeting at a military base discussed coping with "terrorists and the security of the monarchy" and addressing grievances of the Reds, who are mostly from the poor, rural north.

"We want to solve the problem of poverty

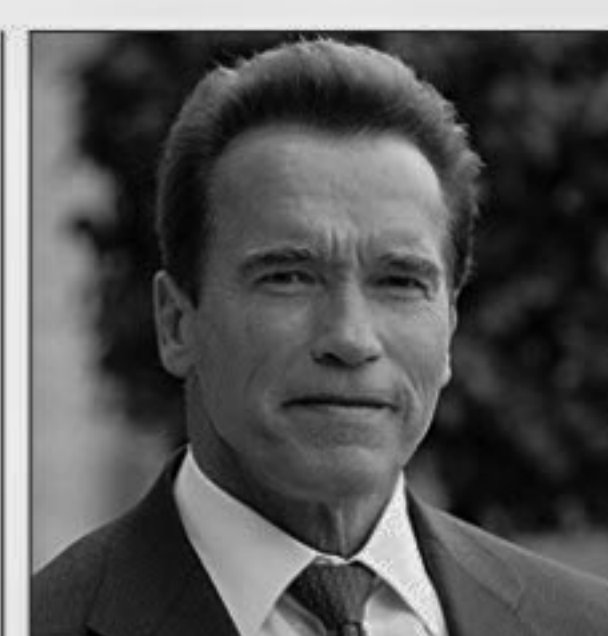
and when the prime minister is ready, he will announce the political guidelines to solve the problem of the rallies," Panitan said.

Many Thais have grown increasingly frustrated with the stalemate, which has claimed the lives of at least 27 people, cost the country tens of millions of dollars, and sparked concerns of a flare-up of civil unrest.

In an emergency meeting Sunday, the Cabinet approved special funding for the police to contain the demonstrators. Ahead of the meeting, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said the government had a plan for ending the crisis but he declined to say what it was.

"I insist that the government has a clear approach," he said in his weekly television address. "All responsibilities rest with me. Every decision has been made. At the moment it's at the stage of execution for the most successful outcome."

Abhisit did not elaborate on what those decisions were, though he expressed willingness to make some compromises.



'I would run for US president'

ANI, Los Angeles

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has admitted that he would run for US President if the law was changed to allow foreign-born candidates to stand.

The bodybuilder-turned-actor-turned-politician was born in Austria and the US Constitution prevents foreign citizens from holding the nation's top job.

When asked if he would make a run for the White House if the law were changed, Schwarzenegger said: "Without any doubt".

ME peace talks to start within days

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli and Palestinian officials said yesterday they expected to start indirect peace talks within days, following the Arab League's endorsement of a US-brokered plan to end the impasse.

"From the very start we have been in favour of peace talks without preconditions and the objective is to start in the coming days, at the latest next week," Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon told public radio.

"It is a positive development. The Arabs also want to break the deadlock," Ayalon added, referring to the Arab League decision Saturday to back a US plan to mediate talks between the sides as a prelude to direct negotiations.

US President Barack Obama's Mideast envoy George Mitchell is due back in the region for another round of shuttle diplomacy this week and is expected to hold talks with both sides.

"President Abbas will meet with Mitchell on Friday," senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told AFP.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office has so far not officially announced a meeting between Mitchell and the premier. Local media reports say the US envoy will meet Israeli officials on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Mogadishu blasts' death toll rises to 32

AFP, Mogadishu

The death toll from twin explosions that rocked a mosque in Mogadishu now stands at least 32, medical sources and a witness said yesterday.

Ali Muse head of Mogadishu's ambulance service, who earlier gave a toll of 25 for Saturday's explosions, told AFP that at least a further five people died of their injuries overnight.

"I'm getting that five more people died in Deynile hospital overnight. I think the number could rise even further since some of the injured are still in a critical condition," he said.

An additional two people died from their wounds overnight in a different part of town, according to Husein Yusuf, another Mogadishu resident.

Somalia's transitional government condemned the blasts, whose exact cause is still unknown.

"This attack was one of the most barbaric acts ever in this country," Dahir Mohamoud Gele, Somalia's information minister, told reporters Sunday.

"Somalia is not culturally known for targeting places of worship. We strongly condemn this attack which killed many civilians," he said.

"This kind of tactic is new and is brought from outside the country," he added.



PHOTO: AFP

Members of a traditional dance troupe perform during an annual royal memorial service at the royal Jongmyo Shrine in central Seoul yesterday. The service, called "Jongmyo Jerye" takes place on a Sunday in the first week of May every year, and was proclaimed as a UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001.

Immigration law could lead to racial profiling: Hillary

ANI, AFP, New York/ Los Angeles

US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton said the passage of a controversial immigration enforcement law in Arizona could lead to racial profiling.

Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed the bill, saying it was in the best interest of the state.

US President Barack Obama has criticized the bill that vests the police with sweeping discretionary powers, allowing them to detain persons for having outlandish accents, or suspected illegal immigrants, irrespective of whether they have or have not committed a crime.

Obama has described the bill as "misguided" and suggested that it would "undermine basic notions of fairness that we cherish as Americans."

"This law is written so broadly that if you were visiting in Arizona and you had an accent and you were a citizen from, you know, my state of New York-you could be subjected to the kind

of inquiry... that this law permits," Politico and The New York Post quoted Hillary as saying.

Tens of thousands of protesters marched through Los Angeles Saturday in a peaceful May Day rally against a tough new immigration law in Arizona that has triggered a nationwide outcry.

An estimated 60,000 marchers turned downtown Los Angeles into a sea of red, white and blue, waving Stars and Stripes flags and demanding the repeal of the Arizona legislation and calling for federal immigration reform.

A Los Angeles Fire Department official put the crowd at 60,000 while police declined to give an official estimate.

A police spokeswoman said the march had gone smoothly, with only one arrest, for vandalism as the carnival-like rally wound up at around 2.30 pm.

The protest was one of more than 70 held across the United States as Hispanic organizations mobilized against Arizona's law.

Ex-KGB officer claims to have cremated Hitler

ANI, Moscow

A former KGB officer has sensationally claimed to have cremated the bones of Adolf Hitler.

Russian Vladimir Gumenyuk, 73, refused to disclose the location of the ashes fearing the site could become a neo-Nazi pilgrimage one.

Vladimir is the last survivor from the team of three sent by the KGB in 1970 to exhume Hitler's remains along with those of his mistress Eva Braun.

"We were ordered to burn the remains of Hitler and all his entourage, and blow them to the wind," The Sun quoted him, as saying.



As protesters gather around the Arizona State Capitol against the State Senate bill 1070 yesterday, protestor Susan Peralta waves her sign next to an Arizona state trooper as a protest against the new immigration law.

PHOTO: AFP