

FBI arrests 3 over NY bomb plot

BBC ONLINE

US authorities investigating the attempted bombing in New York's Times Square have arrested three men during searches over four US states.

The justice department said they were being held over alleged immigration violations after raids in Maine, New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts.

The US attorney general said the three were linked to a man already charged with the attempted attack on 1 May.

Pakistani-born US citizen Faisal Shazhad, 30, lived in Connecticut.

Authorities say Shazhad has waived his US legal rights and is co-operating with federal officials.

Two of the men were arrested in suburbs outside Boston, Massachusetts, and a third in Maine.

A law enforcement official told the Associated Press news agency that two of the men taken into custody from a house near Boston, Massachusetts, were from Pakistan.

The official said one of the men had been arrested because he had overstayed his visa.

Iraqi Qaeda chief vows dark days

AP, Baghdad

Qaeda in Iraq's new leader warned Shias yesterday that "dark days soaked with blood" lie ahead and that a new campaign of attacks was under way.

The warning comes just days after Iraq was wracked by the worst attack this year, a series of coordinated bombings and assassinations that killed 119 people most of them Shias and members of the security forces across 10 cities.

The Iraqi insurgent umbrella group, the Islamic State of Iraq, named al-Nasser Lideen Allah Abu Suleiman as its new minister of war, replacing the Egyptian Abu Ayyub al-Masri, killed in a US-Iraqi military strike on a safe house in April. The ISI counts al-Qaeda as one of its member groups.

"Wait for the long gloomy nights and dark days soaked with blood," said Abu Suleiman, addressing Iraq's "polytheistic rejecters," an insulting term for Shias common among extremist Sunnis. "What is happening to you nowadays is just a drizzle."



Thai soldiers open fire as they clash with "Red Shirt" anti-government protesters in Bangkok yesterday. Thai troops opened fire on "Red Shirt" protesters during clashes in the heart of Bangkok that left one person dead and at least 21 injured.

PHOTO: AFP

Clashes in Kyrgyzstan kill one

60 wounded

AFP, Bishkek

One person was killed and over 60 wounded in clashes in Kyrgyzstan yesterday as the interim government regained control of official buildings seized by supporters of ousted president Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

Shots rang out in the southern cities of Osh and Jalalabad, where hundreds of Bakiyev supporters battled factions loyal to the government with sticks and stones, medical officials said.

In Jalalabad, one person was killed and 63 people were wounded, 32 of them with gun-shot wounds, the health ministry said.

Government supporters retook the regional administration headquarters in Osh earlier in the day, and later Friday also took control of the equivalent building in Jalalabad from Bakiyev supporters, government officials said.

In Bishkek, interim government head Roza Otunbayeva said authorities were "taking all measures to peacefully resolve the situation."

The capital is calm, she said, adding the government is "taking measures to restore order in Jalalabad."

Several Bakiyev allies, including the former head of his office, Usen Sydykov, were detained during the clashes, Otunbayeva said.

Bakiyev supporters had on Thursday seized regional administration buildings in Osh, Jalalabad and the town of Batken. They occupied the airports in Osh and Jalalabad.

The US embassy in Bishkek, in a statement, expressed concern about the violence, urging "the peaceful resolution to the problems that have caused this situation."

Indonesia foils plot to kill president

AP, Jakarta

Indonesian police announced yesterday they had uncovered and foiled a plot to assassinate the president and other top officials, massacre foreigners in Mumbai-style attacks and declare an Islamic state.

The attackers planned to launch their assault during this year's Independence Day ceremony to be attended Aug 17 by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the country's top dignitaries, national police chief Gen Bambang Hendarso Danuri told reporters.

The plot also included taking over hotels and killing foreigners, especially Americans, in violence that would have been reminiscent of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, he said. The plot was revealed during interrogations of dozens of suspects arrested since a February raid on a terrorist training camp in the western province of Aceh, Danuri said.

"They were confident that all state officials and dignitaries would be there," Danuri said. "Killing all the state officials would have accel-

erated the transition from a democracy to a state controlled by Islamic Sharia law."

Some of the newest information on the plot came from a series of raids this week on militant hideouts in and around the capital that yielded 20 arrests as well as a supply of assault rifles, ammunition, telescopes and Jihadist literature. Five suspected militants were killed in those raids.

Most of those arrested were believed to have trained at the Aceh camp, run by a group called al-Qaeda in Aceh, a new Southeast Asia terror network Jemaah Islamiyah.

"If we had not detected them and their military training had been successful, then they would have assassinated foreigners ... as well as police and military posts in Aceh," Danuri said.

"Their plan was also to launch attacks in Jakarta against foreigners especially Americans and attack and control hotels within certain buildings, imitating what happened in Mumbai," he said.



President Yudhoyono

Teenager shot dead in West Bank

AP, Ramallah, West Bank

A Palestinian teenager was found dead from a gunshot wound near his village in the West Bank, and Palestinians said yesterday he was likely shot by an Israeli settler while throwing stones at cars.

Israeli police said that was one possibility under investigation.

The Israeli military, which exercises overall control in the West Bank, said its troops were not involved in the incident.

Palestinian ambulance driver Talal Eideh said his medical team found the boy dead near his village, not far from the West Bank city of Ramallah, on Thursday evening. He was shot in the back, Eideh said.

Abedrasoul Toum, a village resident, said other youths who were with the boy said they were throwing stones at Israeli cars on a nearby road when they came under fire from one or more settlers.

Support for Japan PM dives to new low

AFP, Tokyo

The approval rating for Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama plunged to its lowest since his party's landslide election victory in August, according to a new poll released yesterday.

Support for the cabinet and its centre-left leader -- who has been embroiled in a damaging row over a US airbase and criticised for his weak leadership style -- plunged to 19.1 percent in May, a Jiji Press news agency poll showed.

The rating was down 4.6 percentage points from April, while the disapproval rating rose to 64.1 percent, up 7.6 points.

"The results apparently show public disappointment at Hatoyama's handling of the issue of relocating the US Marine Corps Futenma Air Station in Okinawa Prefecture," Jiji said.

Japan's government is grappling for a solution to a long-running dispute over the controversial base on Okinawa island, which is locally unpopular mainly because of noise, pollution and the risk of accidents.

Hatoyama last week backtracked on an election pledge to move the base off Okinawa and instead agreed to largely honour an earlier pact with Washington to move the base from a city area of Okinawa to a coastal part.

Mass rallies have been held on Okinawa demanding a reduction of the heavy US military presence there, and another rally is planned for this weekend.

Washington has demanded Hatoyama honour the original base relocation plan, stressing that the presence of the Marines in Japan is important to ensure the security of the host nation and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Tokyo government faces upper house elections, expected to be held in July.

Row over N Korea 'Noah's Ark'

BBC ONLINE

Wild animals reportedly caught in Zimbabwe and intended as a gift to North Korea may not survive in the Asian country, conservationists say.

"We're very concerned," Johnny Rodrigues, chairman of the Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force, told the BBC.

He said the habitat may not be suitable for baby elephants, rhinos and other animals which he believed would be secretly flown in pairs to North Korea.

Zimbabwe's state parks officials have not publicly commented on the issue.

North Korea has long been a close ally of Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe.

Rodrigues told the BBC he believed that wild animals - such as baby elephants, giraffes, rhinos and zebras - were being secretly caught in pairs in the past two months in the Hwange National Park, western Zimbabwe.

Tripoli crash survivor boy says he's 'fine'

AFP, Tripoli

The Dutch boy who was the sole survivor of a Libyan plane crash that killed more than 100 people said he is in a lot of pain but keen to go home, in his first comments yesterday since the disaster.

Nine-year-old Ruben van Assouw could remember nothing of Wednesday's crash and was not yet aware that his parents and 11-year-old brother had died in the accident, the Dutch newspaper Telegraaf reported.

"My name is Ruben and I am from Holland," Telegraaf reported on a telephone conversation with the only survivor of the Afriqiyah Airways Airbus A330 that disintegrated on landing at Tripoli airport.

"I am fine, but my legs hurt a lot," the boy told a reporter from the newspaper on the mobile phone of one of his doctors.

Cameron defends change over polls vote rules

BBC ONLINE

David Cameron has defended plans to change the rules on how an election is called, saying they will help the stability of his coalition government.

The Lib Dem-Tory deal agrees to fixed-term parliaments, which can only be dissolved, with support from 55% of MPs.

Labour MPs say it is a "fix" as 50% of MPs plus one can currently trigger a no confidence vote in the government.

Cameron said he was the first prime minister to give up power to call an election and this was a "good change".

Speaking on a visit to the Scottish Parliament, Cameron said there needed to be a "mechanism" to dissolve Parliament and the procedure he was proposing would help to secure a "strong and stable government" over the next five years.

"It is an important change and one I think should be welcome," he said, on a

visit to Scotland to meet First Minister Alex Salmond and other party leaders.

"I'm the first prime minister in British history to give up the right unilaterally to ask the Queen for a dissolution of Parliament. This is a huge change in our system, it is a big giving up of power."

"Clearly, if you want a fixed-term Parliament you have to have a mechanism to deliver it."

"Obviously that is a mechanism that can be debated in the House of Commons, it can be discussed, but I believe that it is a good arrangement to give us strong and stable government."

Downing Street says Labour put through fixed-term laws in Scotland requiring 66% of MSPs to dissolve Parliament.

The prime minister has the power to ask the Queen to dissolve parliament at any time within a five-year period - which critics say benefits the ruling party.

The new coalition government has instead proposed to have five-year fixed term parliaments. But in a coalition agreement drawn up between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, it says legislation "will also provide for dissolution if 55% or more of the House votes in favour".

Currently a majority of MPs - 50% plus one - are needed to carry a vote of no confidence. In 1979 James Callaghan's minority Labour government fell after losing a confidence vote.

Four senior Labour figures - and two Conservative backbenchers, Christopher Chope and Charles Walker, have expressed concern about the plans.

Walker said: "This is perhaps just a little too much for our unwritten constitution to bear". And his colleague Chope told BBC Radio 4's World at One the coalition deal seemed to have been "cobbled together in quite a short space of time".

Britons spend 6-month of their lives discussing weather

AFP, London

Famously weather-obsessed British people spend on average six months of their lives talking about whether it's going to rain or shine, according to a survey published yesterday.

Speculation about whether it's going to be wet, complaints about the cold and exclamations about the heat are also the first points of conversation with strangers or business acquaintances for 58 percent of Britons, it said.

The study of 2,018 adults by pollsters ICM found Britons talk about the weather for about 49 hours every year and the subject comes up more often than work, TV, sport or gossip.



PHOTO: AFP

Esmael Mangudadatu emerges from an armoured personnel carrier (APC) as he arrives at the provincial capitol in Shariff Aguak yesterday, for his proclamation as the winner of the gubernatorial race.

Philippine Muslim massacre clan chief loses election bid

AFP, Manila

The patriarch of a Muslim clan accused of carrying out the Philippines' worst political massacre lost his election bid for a top government position, a polling official said yesterday.

Andal Ampatuan Sr, who is in jail awaiting trial on murder charges, finished in second place for the post of Maguindanao province vice governor, the chairman of the provincial election commission told AFP.

Ampatuan Sr was governor of Maguindanao last year when 57 people travelling in a convoy were abducted in the province and executed on a remote road.

Ampatuan Sr's son and namesake allegedly led the massacre to stop a rival politician, Esmael Mangudadatu, challenging him for the governorship in Monday's national elections.

Mangudadatu's wife and two sisters, who were travelling to an election office to register his candidacy for the governorship, as well as 31 accompanying journalists, were among those killed.

Despite the massacre Mangudadatu continued with his election campaign and Friday's vote count showed he had won, defeating an Ampatuan ally, according to the provincial election commission chairman, Renault Macarambon.

The Ampatuans had ruled the restive Maguindanao province for a decade, earning reputations as fearsome warlords who used a private army numbering thousands of men to terrorise opponents and voters.



PHOTO: AFP

Representatives of the 386-seat Hungarian Parliament sing the national anthem yesterday during the re-formation of Hungary's Parliament. Hungary's conservative Fidesz party secured a two-thirds parliamentary majority after the second round of general elections, giving it free reign to change the constitution.