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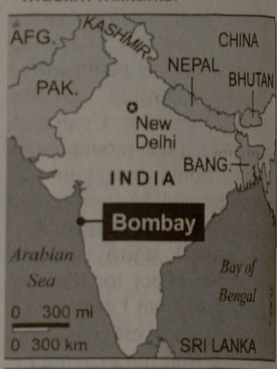
Car blasts kill 46

By Ramola Talwar Badam
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

At least 46 killed
in Bombay blasts

BOMBAY, India — A pair of car bombs ripped through lunchtime crowds in India's financial capital, Bombay, on Monday, killing 44 people and wreaking havoc at a crowded jewelry market and a popular historic landmark. More than 150 people were wounded.

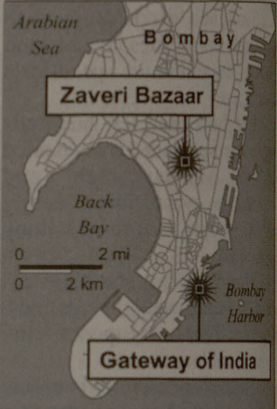
Car bombs exploded at a crowded jewelry market, Zaveri Bazaar, and a historic landmark, the Gateway of India, on Monday. Police were focusing their investigation on Muslim militants.



Police were focusing their investigation on Muslim militant groups. But victims from the explosions were almost certain to include both Muslims and Hindus.

In a cramped shoe store in a corner of the jewelry market, Hindu shopowner Tilak Raj mourned the death of his Muslim employee, Abdul Mullah.

"He had just left the shop and was sitting under a tree when the buildings shook," Raj said. Like many witnesses, he described torn and dismembered limbs strewn by the blast in the narrow road lined with shops. The street was littered with shattered glass and metal and the slippers left by crowds trampling each other to flee.



The bombs were hidden in the trunks of two taxis and exploded within five minutes of each other, police said. Several people were being interrogated, including one taxi driver. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the bombings.

The timing raised concerns the blasts were linked to a dispute over a religious site in the northern city of Ayodhya claimed by both Hindus and Muslims that has been the source of much bloodshed in the past. The bombings came hours after the release of a long-awaited archaeological report on the site that itself showed divisions over the site's history.

SOURCES: ESRI; Associated Press AP

Ranjit Sharma, a police commissioner, also put blame on India's longtime rival, Pakistan, saying suspicion in the blast fell on Islamic militant groups "let loose by the enemy country."

New Delhi accuses Pakistan of supporting militants, which Islamabad denies. Indian police said there was no direct evidence linking those groups, or Pakistan, to Monday's bombings.

He specifically mentioned the Students Islamic Movement of India, or SIMI, a militant Muslim students' group outlawed in 2001, and Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, one of more than a dozen Islamic rebel groups fighting Indian security forces in Kashmir since 1989, seeking independence for the Himalayan province or its merger with Muslim-dominated Pakistan.

The attacks appeared aimed more at the city itself than at members of a particular religion. One of the bombs exploded at the Gateway of India, a historic landmark and tourist attraction built by India's former British colonizers to commemorate the 1911 visit of King George V. The massive arch is often host to outdoor concerts and is a popular lunchtime eating spot for both Hindus and Muslims. The other blast was at the crowded neighborhood of jewelry stores, where many shops are owned by Hindus but where many of the artisans are Muslims.

The reference to Pakistan could increase tension between the nuclear-armed neighbors at a time when the two countries are taking steps to improve relations. Pakistan — which has fought three wars with India and came close to a fourth last year — quickly condemned the attacks as "an act of terrorism."
"We deplore these attacks and

"This is not about religion." "All kinds of people work here — Hindus, Muslims and Christians," said Ali Asghar, 24, a student whose father works in a bank near the jewelry market.

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