

## 14 European hostages freed in Mali

AP, Bamako

A six-month ordeal for 14 European tourists kidnapped by Islamic extremists while on desert safaris in Algeria has ended with their release to officials in neighboring Mali.

The 14 - nine Germans, four Swiss and a Dutchman - were turned over to government officials late Monday, said Seydou Sissouma, spokesman for Mali's President Amadou Toure, whose government has been negotiating for the releases.

The freed hostages were to spend the night in the far northern desert city of Gao, before flying to Mali's capital, Bamako, on Tuesday. They were expected in Germany within a day.

## Taliban rebels kill 10 Afghan policemen

REUTERS, Kabul

Taliban militants killed 10 policemen, including a police chief, in a province south of Kabul in the latest incident in a spate of violence that has claimed more than 90 lives in the past week, officials said yesterday.

Abdul Khaliq, police chief of Logar province, and several other senior police officers from the province were among those killed in an ambush in Kharwar district on Monday, Logar's military commander, Dr Fazlullah Mojadidi, told Reuters.

Khaliq had been returning from a funeral in Kharwar for two family members of a police officer who were killed in a rocket attack blamed on the Taliban, Mojadidi said.

"I am told they were in their cars when the incident happened," Mojadidi said. "There is no doubt that the Taliban were behind it."

## Most Britons trust neither govt nor BBC: Poll

AFP, London

Over half of Britons trust neither their government nor the BBC to tell the truth, and only six percent find Prime Minister Tony Blair's administration more believable than the public broadcaster, according to a poll published Tuesday.

An ICM survey for the left-of-centre Guardian daily shows that while 52 percent of people trust neither the government nor the BBC, 36 percent find the BBC more believable.

Half the electorate also believe the government deliberately embellished its dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction published last September in a bid to make its case for war on Saddam Hussein stronger, according to the poll.

## Amnesty slams US anti-terror campaign

REUTERS, London

Amnesty International yesterday urged the United States to call off plans to try terrorist suspects before military tribunals, and to give international observers access to prisons in Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay.

The international human rights organisation said it was seriously concerned about persistent allegations of ill-treatment and the refusal of US authorities to grant access to independent human rights organisations and lawyers.

"Allegations of abuses such as arbitrary arrests, prolonged incommunicado detention, ill-treatment, interrogations without legal counsel and threats of unfair trials by military bodies are raised each year in the US State Department's reports on human rights practices in other countries," Amnesty International said.

## 'Iran will never give up nuclear technology'

AFP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader has said his country will never give up its nuclear technology under pressure from the United States and others, who are urging Tehran to agree to more stringent inspections of its programs.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told a gathering of Iranian ambassadors late Monday that "the position of the United States and certain Western countries, which require Iran to give up nuclear technology is unsuitable, unjust and oppressive, and the Islamic Republic of Iran will never accept these requests."

"The conditions in which the United States deals with the rest of the world as a creditor, always asking for more, make any weakness and surrender the greatest strategic error," the state news agency IRNA reported him as saying.



PHOTO: AFP

A crying woman holding her child, relative of a defendant in the trial of the May 16 suicide bombings in Casablanca, stands amongst other relatives on Monday in front of the justice hall in Casablanca. A criminal court there awarded death sentence to four suspects who had reiterated their denials of involvement in the attacks that killed 45 people, including 12 of the bombers.

## Morocco spells death to 4 for Casablanca bombing

REUTERS, Casablanca, Morocco

A Moroccan court yesterday sentenced four men to death in connection with suicide bombings in Casablanca three months ago.

The judges found the four guilty of premeditated murder in the five simultaneous attacks on May 16 in which 45 people were killed, including 12 suicide bombers on May 16.

Two of those sentenced to death, Mohamed Omari and Rachid Jalil, were among the 14-member suicide team, but who survived.

The four were among 87 defendants the public prosecutor at the trial accused of belonging to a shadowy, ultra-conservative Islamist movement, the Salafist Jihad, which advocates violence against US interests and Jews in Morocco and also against Muslim Moroccans it finds insufficiently observant.

Morocco has only carried out the death sentence once in the last

20 years, when a police commissioner was executed in 1993 for a three-year orgy of rape and sexual violence.

Of the other defendants facing various charges including criminal conspiracy and undermining the security of the state, 39 received life sentences, 15 sentences of 30 years and 15 of 20 years, nine of 10 years, two of eight years, one of six years, and two of 10 months.

In a pause after the sentences were announced, most of the defendants started shouting "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest), with some standing on benches within their glassed-in enclosure in the courtroom waving their fists in the air.

Police moved in and swiftly hustled them from the court.

The defendants included a mosque preacher who received life imprisonment, and three other preachers sentenced to 30 years each.

Many of the defendants protested their innocence and said

they were patriotic citizens opposed to violence.

The public prosecutor had argued in court they were all adherents of the Salafist Jihad.

Prosecutors said some of the defendants had been primed to carry out subsequent attacks at places frequented by tourists in the towns of Marrakesh, Agadir and Essaouira, as part of a violent Jihad, or holy struggle, against Western, Jewish and US interests.

The lawyer for one of the preachers, Mohamed Fizazi, said he would appeal his 30-year sentence.

Fizazi, a well-known preacher from Tangiers in northern Morocco, said in a rhetorical address to the judges that he was a patriot who had never excommunicated fellow Muslims.

He said he opposed "the crimes of Casablanca" as did all Muslims and all humankind, and they must not be repeated.

## Accord on Israeli pullback from WB towns

Tel Aviv resumes indirect contact with Hezbollah over prisoner swap

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli media reported yesterday an agreement on the pullback of Israeli troops from two West Bank towns this week but Palestinian officials denied a final accord had been reached.

Public radio here quoted Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz as saying Israel was ready to hand over security control of the towns of Jericho and Qalqilya if the Palestinians fulfilled certain conditions.

"The Palestinians will have to prevent terrorists from leaving these towns," Mofaz said, reiterating Israel's requirement that it be protected from Islamic militants seeking to carry out anti-Israeli attacks.

Mofaz said the pullbacks would eventually be extended to the towns of Ramallah and Tulkarem, according to the radio.

The web site of the Yedioth

Aharonot newspaper quoted Mofaz as saying the Israelis would hand over control of Jericho and Qalqilya in two days.

The daily Haaretz said the decision on a handover had been made Tuesday by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his top security aides.

General Rephey Arafat, who was due to lead the Palestinian delegation later Tuesday at a new round of talks on the withdrawals, said he had not been informed in a change of the situation.

"Until now the Israelis have not informed us about anything and we are still waiting for the meeting tonight," he told AFP.

Meanwhile, Israeli officials confirmed Tuesday that they have renewed indirect contact through Germany with the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah about the possibility of prisoner exchanges.

An official quoted in several newspapers said Hezbollah "had

very slightly adjusted its demands" but was still "unrealistic" about the prospects of an agreement.

Reserve General Ilan Biran, who is in charge of efforts to secure the release of up to four Israelis held since October 2000, visited Germany two weeks ago for talks about the exchanges, Israeli television reported Monday night.

Earlier this month, a German intermediary visited Israel, as well as Lebanon, where he met with Hezbollah leaders, according to the same report.

Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah said in remarks published Monday that negotiations with Israel would begin soon over the exchange of prisoners.

"Some contacts have already started and negotiations will begin shortly ... We are looking to see through the current mediation to a happy end to this issue," Nasrallah told Saudi Arabia's Al-Watan news-

paper. Nasrallah warned that if the proposed talks fail, Hezbollah will work to capture more Israeli soldiers in order to force the Jewish state to accept a solution.

Three of the Israelis said to be held by Hezbollah were captured around the disputed Shebaa Farms area close to the Israeli, Lebanese and Syrian border. But Israel suspects that the three may be dead.

Hezbollah also claims to hold reservist colonel Elhanan Tenenbaum. The militia has accused him of being an agent of the Israeli secret service, Mossad, but Israel insists he is a businessman.

Israel is holding around 20 Lebanese, including senior Hezbollah figures Abdel Karim Obeid and Mustapha Dirani, who were captured in 1994.

## Home of Karzai's brother bombed

AP, Kandahar

A bomb ripped through the home of the brother of Afghan President Hamid Karzai yesterday, causing no injuries but sending clouds of black smoke billowing from the sprawling compound in the country's south.

Police said the bomb went off inside the house of Ahmed Wali Karzai, but so far no one has claimed responsibility. The president's brother was not at home at the time.

Kandahar is the traditional home of Karzai, as well as the spiritual headquarters of the former Taliban regime ousted in the 2001 US-led coalition war on terror.

The area around the younger Karzai's home was quickly cordoned off. There was no immediate comment from the Afghan president, who was the target of an assassination attempt in southern Kandahar on Sept. 5, 2002.

## Applications for US immigrant visa lottery must be online

AP, Washington

Foreigners who want to participate in a lottery for immigrant visas must now do so online.

The US State Department on Monday announced it would no longer accept mailed or paper applications for the diversity visa lottery, an option for foreigners who are not eligible for visas through business or family ties.

Applications filed electronically will cost the department less, reduce duplicate filings and be more reliable for some applicants than their home country mail service, said Kelley Shannon, Bureau of Consular Affairs spokeswoman.

Applicants will apply through the consular affairs Web site and will be required to submit a digital photo.

About six million people apply to participate in the visa lottery annually, the department said. From those applications, about 90,000 to 100,000 are chosen to vie for the chance for one of about 55,000 visas, Shannon said.



PHOTO: AFP

Protesters demonstrate in front of the Royal Courts of Justice as they wait for Alistair Campbell, Labour's communications director to arrive at court to testify at the Hutton Inquiry yesterday in London. Campbell's testimony is likely to be crucial in understanding the events leading up to the apparent suicide of British weapons expert, Dr David Kelly, as well as Britain's assessment of Iraq's weapons capability leading up to the US and British led invasion of the country.

## British probe hears Blair's office 'substantially' altered Iraq dossier

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's office authorised a "substantial rewrite" of a controversial government dossier on Iraq, an inquiry into the apparent suicide of weapons expert David Kelly heard Monday.

Kelly's death is the subject of a parliamentary inquiry, amid allegations -- reportedly based on the weapons scientist's evidence -- that the Blair administration beefed up intelligence data to bolster the case for war on Iraq.

An email from Blair's director of communications Alastair Campbell to chief-of-staff Jonathan Powell, dated September 5, disclosed that the dossier was being substantially rewritten ahead of its publication on September 24.

Campbell, 46, is the man accused by BBC journalist Andrew

Gilligan of personally embellishing Downing Street's controversial dossier on Iraq, aimed at justifying the case for military action ahead of the March war.

Gilligan alleged in a British newspaper article on June 1 that Campbell, who is set to testify before the probe Tuesday, was responsible for inserting a sensational claim into the dossier, a week before its publication, that stated Iraq could deploy chemical or biological weapons in just 45 minutes.

Documents released to the inquiry Monday showed that the dossier should be altered "as per TB's discussion" -- an apparent reference to Tony Blair.

It said: "Re dossier, substantial rewrite with JS and Julian M in charge, which JS will take to US next Friday, and be in shape Monday thereafter. "Structure as

per TB's discussion. Agreement that there has to be real intelligence material in their presentation."

JS apparently referred to John Scarlett, the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, while Julian Miller was the Cabinet Office's chief-of-the-assessment-staff. The US stood for the United States.

Meanwhile a separate email from Powell, also presented to the inquiry Monday, outlined his misgivings over the dossier on the potential threat of Iraqi weapons.

The government row with the BBC over whether or not the government "sexed up" the dossier and Kelly's subsequent and mysterious death have left Blair, who is dwindling badly in opinion polls, facing his gravest crisis since coming to power in 1997.

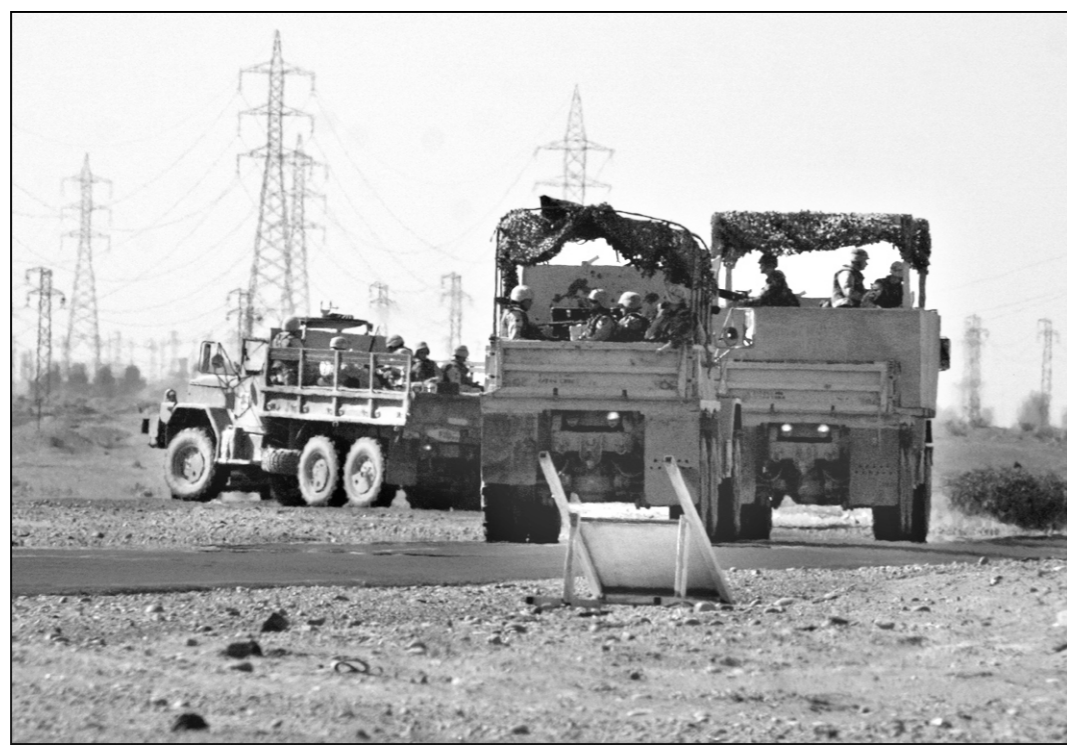


PHOTO: AFP

US military vehicles patrol in Tikrit, 175 km north of Baghdad, where twelve Iraqi people were killed in a blast at an ammunition dump on Monday. Eyewitnesses said only one body was lifted from the dump by US troops because of the danger of more possible explosions.

## Palestinians forced to flee their homes: Israeli NGO

Grim picture of Israel's HR violations in Hebron

AFP, Jerusalem

An Israeli NGO published a damning report Tuesday on human rights violations in the Israeli-controlled sector of the southern West Bank city of Hebron, which it said have forced many Palestinians to flee their homes.

B'Tselem said 43 percent of the inhabitants in the three main streets of the so-called H-2 area, near the enclave of 500 Jewish settlers that lies in the heart of the city, have abandoned their homes since the start of the intifada in September 2000.

"According to our investigation, 73 of the 169 families living in these streets have left, while some 2,000 shops and businesses in the Casbah (Old city) have closed," the coordinator of the report, Shlomo Suissa, told AFP.

"Three schools in which 1,835 pupils studied were taken over by the Israel Defence Forces and closed," said the report.

Among the reasons which led to the departure of the families, B'Tselem cites "violence by the

settlers and the lack of law enforcement".

"IDF soldiers and border police officers commit acts of violence against Palestinian residents in the city," the report also said.

The report also blamed the army-imposed curfews and said "the Israeli security forces do not allow Palestinians in Hebron to move about freely in the city, to study, to earn a living, and to meet their everyday needs."

"The ongoing abuse of Hebron's Palestinian population results from the settlers' presence in the city," the report said.

There are some 1,200 Israeli soldiers and policemen tasked with guarding the enclave -- which includes the Tomb of the Patriarchs, holy to both Jews and Muslims.

Very long curfews are imposed on Palestinians living on some of the main streets in central H-2, which settlers from neighbouring Jewish settlements use to go to and from the enclave.

The Israeli army issued a long statement in response to B'Tselem's report, justifying its acts in the

Hebron.

"The IDF is well aware that curfews are seen as drastic measures, not to be used except for situations where they are essential for protecting the lives of civilians and soldiers," the statement said.

The statement charges that B'Tselem ignored shooting incidents against settlers in the area, the most dramatic of which was a sniper attack on a group walking along the so-called "worshippers trail" that left 12 people left.

Hebron is the only Palestinian city in which Israeli and Palestinian residents live side by side. Due to this, and the large number of terrorist attacks against the Israeli residents and the IDF soldiers protecting them, the city poses a complex security challenge," the army added.

Israel evacuated 80 percent of the city in 1997, following an agreement with the Palestinian Authority, but has continued to occupy a smaller area, where some 600 Jewish settlers have moved, surrounded by 120,000 Palestinians.

## Liberian govt-rebels ink peace deal

Bush sees US troops out by Oct 1

REUTERS, Monrovia

A peace deal signed by Liberia's government and rebel factions offered new hope to the broken West African country on Tuesday of an end to nearly 14 years of savage bloodshed.

The deal in Ghana between President Moses Blah's government and rebels holding more than three-quarters of the country came a week after pariah leader Charles Taylor fled into exile.

Under the deal, Blah will step down in October for a chairman of an interim government to guide Liberia to elections by 2005. The chairman, who will not come from any of the warring factions, is expected to be picked this week.

The rebels, Blah's government, opposition parties and civil society groups will share jobs in the cabinet and parliament.

It came as welcome relief on the streets of Monrovia, where 2,000 people died in the most recent spell of blood-letting

before the deployment of West African peacekeepers, backed by U.S. Marines.

"This country has not been in peace since as long as I can remember," said 38-year old Sanfo Massaquoi, putting his arm protectively around his eight-year-old daughter. "I hope there is going to be peace, so I can find a job and make a living."

At the United Nations, Secretary General Kofi Annan welcomed the signing of the peace agreement.

AFP adds: US President George W. Bush says UN troops will replace US forces deployed in Liberia by October 1, according to an interview transcript the White House released here Monday.

"We'll be out of there by October 1. We've got UN blue helmeted troops ready to replace our limited number of troops," Bush told Armed Forces Radio and Television Service in an exclusive interview last Thursday.