

US Muslims plagued by discrimination after 9/11 attacks

AFP, Dearborn

Discrimination and harassment by law enforcement have come to plague American Muslims in the years since the terrorist attacks of September 11.

There have been suspicious looks, slurs, physical attacks, extra screening at airports and arrests on groundless charges.

And it seems to be getting worse. A recent Gallup poll showed that 39 percent of Americans admit to being prejudiced against Muslims and that nearly a quarter say they would not want a Muslim for a neighbour.

"Most Americans don't know Muslims except for those they work with in an urban environment so all the information they get is through the media," said Dawud Walid, director of the Michigan chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations.

After having shown some

restraint in his rhetoric after 19 Muslim men affiliated with al-Qaeda flew planes into the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, President George W. Bush has of late been using far more inflammatory language such as 'Islamofacists,' Walid said.

"When the religious and political leaders use polarizing language these are the unfortunate side effects. It stretches from the likes of (Christian Coalition leader) Pat Robinson all the way up to President Bush."

CAIR has seen a steady increase in the number of complaints of harassment, violence and discriminatory treatment over the past five years. In 2004, complaints rose 49 percent to 1,522, of which 141 were reports of actual and potentially violent hate crimes.

It appears that those numbers will continue to rise in 2005 and 2006, Walid said.

Israel to lift blockade of Lebanon in a week

Says Israeli defence minister

AFP, Beirut

Lebanese Defence Minister Elias Murr said Saturday he had been assured Israel would lift its air and sea blockade within a week, during a meeting with UN special envoy Geir Pedersen.

"We have received assurance from Mr. Pedersen that the blockade would be lifted in the coming days or within a week, the Israeli government is meeting tomorrow (Sunday) and a decision could be taken along those lines," Murr told journalists.

Murr told reporters he had been assured that "Israeli troops were going to withdraw from Lebanon as soon as possible, within two to three weeks."

Meanwhile, more Italian troops were deployed Sunday in Lebanon as part of the first major reinforcement in nearly 30 years of the UN mission monitoring a truce between Israel and the Shiite militant group Hezbollah.

The troops, who began landing Saturday in the southern coastal city

of Tyre, were due to unload heavy equipment at Beirut port while about 150 commandos were set to arrive at the capital's airport.

Lieutenant Federico Mariani, a spokesman for the Italian troops, told AFP that around half of the full contingent of 878 commandos had landed in Tyre by early Sunday.

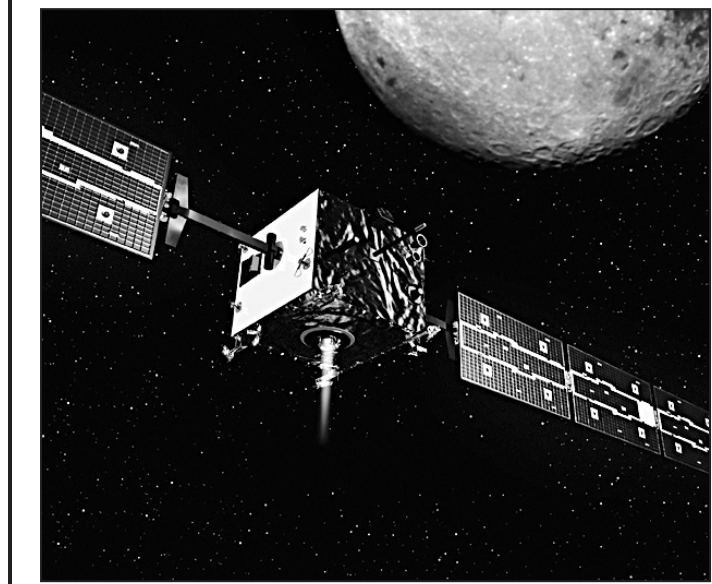
He said the troops were going to a staging area on the outskirts of Tyre and were preparing to work with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil).

Italian vehicles were seen entering and leaving an existing Unifil base on a hilltop in Borj Qalawi, about 30 minutes from Tyre, as troops began setting up operations, an AFP correspondent said.



Ducks and seagulls use the National Mall near the US Capitol (rear) Saturday in Washington, DC, during rains. A more benign strain of the deadly bird flu virus that has ravaged poultry farms in Asia, Europe and other parts of the world has been discovered near the US capital in an indication the pathogen may be making inroads into North America, the US government reported.

European probe smashes into moon



Artistic view released by ESA yesterday shows the Europe's first probe to the Moon, SMART-1, before its scheduled crash landing on the moon. SMART-1, crashed onto the lunar surface as scheduled at 7.42 am (0542 GMT) Sunday, ending a successful 16-month mission, the European Space Agency announced.

AP, Darmstadt

Europe's first spacecraft to the moon ended its three-year mission yesterday with a planned crash, hitting its target after ground controllers had to manoeuvre it around a looming crater rim.

The SMART-1 spacecraft slammed into volcanic plain called the Lake of Excellence at 1 1/4 miles per second right on time. The impact was captured by observers on Earth, and scientists hoped the resulting cloud of dust and debris would provide clues to the geologic composition of the site.

"That's it we are in the Lake of Excellence," said spacecraft operations chief Octavio Camino as applause broke out in the European Space Agency's mission control centre in Darmstadt, Germany. "We have landed."

Minutes later, a video screen on the control room wall showed an image of the bright flash from the impact. The infrared image was captured by the Canada France Hawaii Telescope on Mount Kea, in Hawaii.

"It was a great mission and a

great success and now it's over," said mission manager Gerhard Schwehm.

During its months in orbit around the moon, the spacecraft scanned the lunar surface from orbit and took high-resolution pictures. But its primary mission was testing a new, efficient, ion propulsion system that officials hope to use on future interplanetary missions, including the BepiColombo mission to Mercury slated for 2013.

SMART-1 was launched into Earth's orbit by an Ariane-5 booster rocket from Kourou, French Guiana, in September 2003. It used its ion engine to slowly raise its orbit over 14 months until the moon's gravity grabbed it.

The engine, which uses electricity from the craft's solar panels to produce a stream of charged particles called ions, generates only small amounts of thrust but only needed 176 pounds of xenon fuel.

US policies fuelling terrorism: Khatami

AFP, Chicago

Former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami said late Saturday that US foreign policy was fuelling terrorism and warned a conference of Muslims in Chicago of the dangers of allowing "narrow minded viewpoints and practices" to dominate public policy and discourse.

His remarks came as Tehran and the UN Security Council head for a showdown over Iran's nuclear energy programme, which is suspected of masking an effort to develop atomic weapons.

Khatami is the most senior Iranian to visit the United States since Washington broke off diplomatic relations following the 1979 takeover of the US embassy in Tehran.

He did not comment on the current impasse but spoke of the need to promote dialogue and understanding in order to stem the current cycle of violence.

US sanctions threat a psychological game

Says Iran over nuke row

REUTERS, AFP, Tehran

Iran said yesterday the threat of sanctions was a "psychological game" aimed at putting pressure on the Islamic Republic over its nuclear programme, which the West fears is aimed at producing atomic weapons.

Iran failed to meet a UN Security Council deadline on Aug 31, to halt uranium enrichment, which can make fuel for power plants or material for weapons. It now faces the threat of sanctions.

"I think the issue of sanctions is more like a psychological game," Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi told a news conference.

Iran has repeatedly shrugged off the threat of sanctions, saying such a move would hurt industrialised economies more than Iran by driving already high oil prices higher still. "Right now we should think about

solving the issues through negotiations. I think the matter of sanctions was only brought up by some Zionist American circles to exert pressure," he said.

The United States said on Friday it was consulting European governments about possible sanctions against the Islamic Republic, but the EU has signalled it wants more dialogue and has agreed to try to clarify Iran's stance within two weeks.

European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana will meet Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Larjani, next week to try to clear up ambiguities in Tehran's reply to the major powers' offer of broad cooperation if it stops the nuclear work.

Iran, the world's fourth largest oil exporter which is brimming with petrodollars, says it can cope with any sanctions imposed, but economists say its economy would still suffer from punitive

measures such as restrictions on European financing.

Iran has defied Western demands to suspend uranium enrichment, a process that can be used to make nuclear fuel and, in highly extended form, the explosive core of an atomic bomb.

Its rejection of a UN deadline which expired last Thursday to halt enrichment has left it facing a push by the United States for the Security Council to impose sanctions on Tehran.

Annan, in a weekend newspaper interview, expressed reservations over the US drive to impose sanctions, warning patience would prove more effective than sanctions in persuading Iran to suspend sensitive uranium enrichment work.

MILITARY COMMAND HANDOVER

Iraq, US lock horns

REUTERS, Baghdad

Talks between the United States and Iraq over the transfer of operational command of Iraq's armed forces were deadlocked yesterday, with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki demanding more independence from the US military.

A day after the dispute forced an embarrassing delay of a signing ceremony in Baghdad, an Iraqi Defence Ministry source said disagreements remained over the wording of a document that outlines the new relationship between US-led occupying forces and Iraq's new military.

"There are some disputes between the two parties. We have our own point of view and they have theirs. We want thorough control

and want the freedom to make decisions independently," the source told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

Saturday's ceremony to transfer control of Iraq's army from US commander General George Casey to the Iraqi Defence Ministry had been hailed by US officials as a big step towards Iraq taking responsibility for security.

The US military, suffering almost daily casualties that have sapped domestic support for the war in Iraq, has been training Iraq's fledgling military under a plan that would allow it to begin withdrawing its 140,000 troops.

Maliki, keen to be seen as ending his dependency on US military power, said last week his forces would take control of most of Iraq

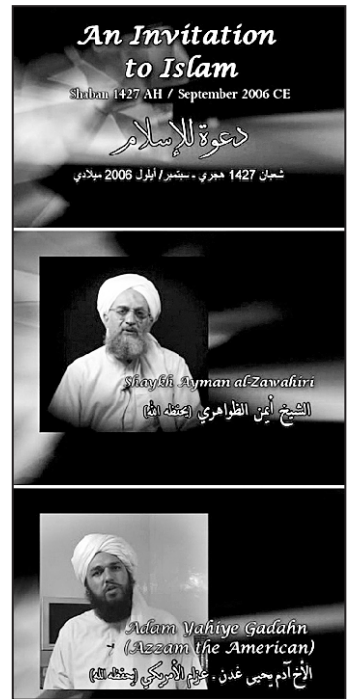
from foreign troops by the end of the year.

A US military spokesman said the dispute centred over the document's wording and played down major disagreements between the two sides, adding that he expected it would be signed soon.

"It's not a matter of major substance, but they're not happy with the wording of the document," Lieutenant Colonel Barry Johnson told Reuters late on Saturday.

"It is embarrassing, but it was decided it was better not to sign the document," he said.

But in a sign that negotiations could drag on, Mohammed al-Askari, spokesman for Iraq's Defence Ministry, said the government would take its time until an agreement was reached.



A composite of frame grabs taken from a video entitled "An invitation to Islam" produced by Al-Sahab and released on September 2 shows the number two leader in al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri (middle), and "Azzam the American" (bottom), a US national converted to Islam sought by the FBI and identified as Adam Yahye Gadahn.

al-Qaeda deputy urges Americans to convert to Islam

AFP, Dubai

al-Qaeda number two Ayman al-Zawahiri urged Americans to convert to Islam in a video featuring a converted US national sought by the FBI, who spoke particularly to American soldiers, but the US said it reflected the terrorists' "twisted view of Islam."

In the 48-minute video released Saturday, Zawahiri presented "Azzam the American", and urged the "American people in particular and Westerners in general to listen to the extremely serious words of our brother Azzam the American concerning their fate."

"Our brother Azzam the American is trying to lead his own (people) from obscurity towards the light. Listen to him," insisted Zawahiri, who wore a white tunic and turban.

In an Arabic translation of a poorly audible English statement, a man previously identified by the FBI as Adam Yahye Gadahn said: "I call on all Americans and other infidels to embrace Islam."