

27 Israeli reserve pilots refuse to bomb Palestinians

NEW YORK TIMES, Jerusalem

Twenty-seven reserve pilots in the Israeli Air Force presented a signed petition Wednesday saying that they would not take part in "illegal and immoral" strikes in Palestinian areas in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The airstrikes, aimed at Hamas militants, sometimes kill Palestinian civilians.

"We refuse to participate in air force attacks on civilian populations," said the letter, which was sent to the head of the air force, Maj. Gen. Dan Halutz. "We refuse to continue harming innocent civilians."

The petition is similar to a letter signed by hundreds of reserve soldiers who have pledged not to serve in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. Most of the pilots who signed the petition have not been on active duty in recent years, the air force said. It was not clear whether any had been involved in the strikes.

Israel calls the strikes "targeted killings." They have broad support among Israelis, with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government saying they are the most effective way to attack terrorists who hide among civilians.

The Israeli news media said one of the petition's signers was Yiftach Spector, a brigadier general in the reserves, who took part in the bombing of the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq in 1981.

In a sharp response to the pilots' letter, General Halutz said members of the military should not take political positions. "We do not choose our wars or missions," he said on Israeli television.

"We will continue to hunt terrorists," he said, adding, "We have no intention of harming civilians."

One recent Israeli target, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, emerged Wednesday for the first time since he was lightly wounded on September 6 in the bombing of a Gaza City apartment where he was meeting with Hamas members.

In a news conference at a Gaza City mosque, the defiant

Woman rescued 11 days after 'abduction'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sabujbagh police rescued a Bangladeshi-born American young woman 11 days after she was believed to have been abducted and held three suspected abductors at Chulkati in Keraniganj yesterday.

Police rescued Fahmida Alam Lucky from a house at noon and arrested Ashrafia Alam Monir, Mintu and Hakim for their alleged involvement in the crime.

Earlier, Lucky's father filed a general diary with Sabujbagh Police Station accusing the arrestees.

A gang kidnapped her on September 15 from the Chulkati intersection in Keraniganj while she was going to a relative's house, police said.

However, another source claimed that Lucky had an affair with Monir and left with him willingly as her parents were against their relationship.

A case was filed with Keraniganj Police Station.

9 criminals held with arms cache

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Nalchiti police arrested nine alleged criminals of notorious Azim Bahini with arms and ammunition in Jhalakathi in last two days.

Tipped off, police raided the gang's hideout in Kumarkhali fish project area Wednesday night while they were preparing for a robbery. After a gunfight, police held Azim's brother Masud, Milon Khalifa, Asif Chowdhury, Salam, Jahangir, Jamal and Shohag. However, gang leader Azim fled, sources said.

The sources added police recovered one single breach-loaded (SBL) gun, one light gun, seven bullets, 12 hand made bombs, huge bomb-making materials and sharp weapons from the spot.

Upon information from the arrestees, police raided another hideout of the gang at Naruttampur yesterday morning and nabbed Badal and Anwar with one SBL gun, police said.

The gang members are wanted in many criminal cases with various local police stations, police added.

The Jhalakathi Magistrate's Court sent the criminals to jail after police produced them before the court yesterday.

AL activist chopped to death in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

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"Resistance and holy war are the only choices for victory," he said. "We promised God and we promised the people that we won't surrender and we won't raise white flags."

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US troops cleared over Iraqi cop killings

BBC ONLINE

The US military has cleared its troops of any wrongdoing in a friendly fire incident in Falluja in which eight Iraqi policemen were killed.

An investigation into the fire fight earlier this month - in which a Jordanian guard was also killed - concluded that the troops had acted "within the construct of the military's rules of engagement".

"The initial reports were clear. There was initial fire and it was a 30-second engagement. At the end of it, the policemen were dead," the US commander in Iraq, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez said.

But his remarks appeared to be at odds with reports of the incident by Iraqi policemen injured in the 12 September incident.

The men who died were members of the local US-trained protection force.

Several of them said the firing began as several Iraqi police vehicles approached a US checkpoint near the Jordanian military hospital on the outskirts of Falluja, 50 kilometres (30 miles) west of Baghdad.

The police were chasing a car carrying several wanted gunmen.

It appears there were three police vehicles - one an unmarked pick-up with a rear-mounted machine gun - chasing a fourth vehicle containing gunmen.

The policemen said they begged the American soldiers to stop shooting, screaming in Arabic and English that they were police.

But the troops kept firing for 30 minutes, the survivors told Associated Press.

Falluja, a stronghold of supporters of ousted Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, has been the scene of frequent clashes involving US troops.

Muggers stab fruit trader, snatch Tk 20,000

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Muggers yesterday stabbed a fruit trader and snatched away from him reportedly Tk 20,500 from Babubazar in the old part of the city.

A gang of six waylaid the victim Sulaiman Sardar, 35, under the Babubazar Bridge at around 8:15am, when he was going to Badamali by a rickshaw to buy fruits for his shop.

As Sulaiman refused to hand over the cash he was carrying, the gang stabbed him.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Sulaiman is a resident of Section 11 in Mirpur.

The duty officer of the Kotwali Police Station said last night they were not aware of the incident.

Block 9

FROM PAGE 1
Chevron-Texaco or Niko will pay its share of costs. If Niko bears 66 percent cost then the question is bound to pop up is under what capacity the company will do that.

"Does this company have enough finances to keep its Block 9 commitment?" he asked. "And Tullow is perhaps waiting for the clouds to clear up."

The foreign companies have spent about \$20 million so far in the block to conduct seismic survey, purchase land to begin drilling and to address other issues. They are supposed to spend another \$20 million before April next year to fulfil the commitments of drilling three exploratory wells and then move on to the second phase of the PSC for development of possible gas fields.

The worst might not have come yet, fear industry insiders. They say if the government does not take a strong position on the pullout, Tullow might follow suit, paving the way for incompetent investors to take over the highly prospective block.

The Block 9 is located near the Titas gas field where all the vital power plants and gas pipeline connections are situated.

(See details on Page-18)

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