

US frees 707 Iraqi detainees

AFP, Baghdad

US forces in Iraq have released a total of 707 detainees in the first three weeks of the month of Ramadan, the military said yesterday.

"The detainees were no longer determined a security threat and were released," a statement said.

On September 13, when Ramadan began in Iraq, the US military said it would release 50 to 80 detainees a day under Operation Lion's Paw, a joint venture with the Iraqi government.

Freed detainees "must go through our education, enlightenment programmes and have gone through assessments with clerics and clerks," the military said.

Also upon release, they needed to go through the pledge and guarantor programme, under which they promise to maintain peace and good conduct.

"We are releasing whoever is no longer determined a security threat; it could be from any category," the military said.

Around 20,000 detainees are held in US-run prisons in Iraq, mostly in Camp Bucca near the southern port city of Basra and in Camp Cropper near Baghdad.

"The average time that a detainee spends at one of the two Theatre Internment Facilities is one year," the military said.

Plane crash in DR Congo kills 25

AFP, Kinshasa

A Soviet-era Antonov 26 cargo plane crashed in Kinshasa on Thursday, smashing through a dozen houses and killing 25 people on board, with a still unknown casualty toll in the ground, officials said.

The aircraft carved a path of destruction through the heavily populated Masina district in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo capital just after taking off. Witnesses said it exploded in a fireball on impact.

"There were 27 people on the plane and 25 died and two members of the crew, a mechanic and an air hostess survived," Michel Bonnardeaux, a spokesman for the UN mission in the DRC, said, quoting local officials.

Humanitarian Affairs Minister Jean-Claude Muyambo told AFP the twin-engine plane belonged to the Africa One airline and had been headed to Tshikapa in the vast country's central Kasai-Occidental province.

Poorly equipped fire-fighters fought desperately to put out the flames.

"There are no survivors. The aircraft is completely burned out," a senior police officer at the scene initially said. "The number of people also killed in the houses it struck isn't yet known."

The Antonov's crew had informed airport authorities that five crew and 14 passengers were on board, but an official with the RVA national aviation authority told AFP it was common practice to declare an incorrect passenger manifest to avoid taxes.

The Antonov 26, a twin-propeller transport aircraft whose design dates back to the 1960s, is typical of the ageing fleet that has become an essential part of the transport infrastructure in the DR Congo.

Amnesty urges doctors to stop lethal injection for execution

AFP, London

Human rights organisation Amnesty International called on doctors and nurses around the world yesterday to refuse to execute prisoners by lethal injection, saying it breaches their ethical oath.

In a new report, Amnesty said some doctors have expressed concern that prisoners can experience "excruciating" pain as they die if an anaesthetic administered at the same time wears off before their hearts stop.

"There is a global consensus within the medical profession that the involvement of health professionals in carrying out an execution, particularly by a method using the technology and knowledge of medicine, is a breach of medical ethics, yet health professionals are participating in such executions," said Jim Welsh, Amnesty's health and human rights coordinator.

The organisation also reiterated its call for the death penalty to be abolished.

Since 1982, hundreds of people have been killed by lethal injection worldwide, including 919 in the United States and "hundreds, perhaps thousands" in China, where the government does not release figures, Amnesty said.

Hunt for anti-junta protesters on in Myanmar, dozens held

AFP, Yangon

Security forces combed through Yangon rounding up activists as Myanmar's regime tightened its grip on power yesterday, while a UN envoy prepared a key report on last week's bloody crackdown on protesters.

Dozens of people were arrested overnight as security forces raided homes near Yangon's Shwedagon Pagoda, Myanmar's holiest Buddhist shrine and a key rallying point for the mass protests, residents said.

Soldiers enforced an overnight curfew and swept into homes to make targeted arrests from a blacklist of campaigners following the largest anti-regime demonstrations in almost 20 years, the residents said.

"They have a curfew in place and every night they arrest people,"

said Shari Villarosa, US head of mission in the military-ruled country.

On the streets, she said, "a semblance of normalcy has returned, but those of us who live here see the mood has changed. There has always been a lot of discontent, but now it's mixed with anger and fear."

"That's been simmering for years, and now it's been heightened by anger by what has been done against the demonstrators, the atrocities that have been committed against the monks."

One resident, asking not to be named, told AFP: "Many people were arrested during the night, but it is really hard to say exactly how many people were arrested. But none of the usual vendors around Shwedagon Pagoda can be found."

Authorities have released some detainees, but the empty streets, where thousands of Buddhist

monks normally collect alms at dawn, are evidence of the scale of the crackdown.

"We think there were considerably more than 10 killed," Villarosa said, disputing the official toll. On the number arrested, she said: "I feel fairly certain that they are in the thousands."

Most Yangon monasteries seem empty, leaving neighbours to wonder if the monks have been arrested, injured or worse.

"We have to hide," one monk told AFP. "We joined the protests very peacefully to pray for the people. Now I don't know what has happened, but we have to hide. I hope things will be back to normal soon."

During daylight hours, soldiers and police stay largely out of sight after storming through the city last week, killing at least 13 people and

arresting more than 1,000 to break up the mass rallies.

Activists who had harnessed technology to send photographs and video of the protests around the world have now found those weapons turned against them.

Security forces also recorded the protests, apparently using those images to compile lists of activists whom they are now hunting down, residents say.

The crackdown has continued even as the international community has ratcheted up the pressure on the military, which has been in power for 45 years.

UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari was to brief Secretary General Ban Ki-moon later Thursday about his four-day mission here, during which he met the ruling generals and the detained opposition icon Aung San Suu Kyi.

Iran defiant on nuke amid EU sanctions call

AFP, Tehran

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday reaffirmed Iran would not give in to international pressure over its nuclear programme amid French-led calls for EU sanctions against the Islamic republic.

"On the nuclear issue, the enemies have assembled all they have but I tell the whole world that Iran has conquered difficult passes and no power can halt the successive victories of Iran," he said according to the ISNA news agency.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner has written to his EU partners urging them to take economic sanctions to pressure Iran to end its nuclear defiance, his ministry said on Wednesday.

A British foreign office spokesman said London "wholeheartedly" backed Kouchner's call for

the European Union to consider new economic sanctions against Tehran.

Such moves would be in parallel to the existing UN sanctions regime against Iran imposed by two Security Council resolutions. The United States is seeking a third UN resolution imposing sanctions.

Iran has flouted UN Security Council calls for it to suspend sensitive uranium enrichment operations, which the West fears could be used to make a nuclear weapon.

But Ahmadinejad repeated his defiant line, invoking once again his fervent belief in the "hidden" 12th imam Mahdi who Shiites believe disappeared 1,200 years ago and will one day return to save the world.

"As God promised, the oppressors will have their noses rubbed in the dirt. Now they are fulfilling

this promise by themselves," he said.

"Let it be known that in whatever we do, I see the hand of God and the hidden imam at every moment."

Tehran insists its atomic drive is entirely peaceful and solely aimed at generating energy.

Kouchner had last month provoked an angry reaction from the Islamic republic by warning the world to brace for war with Tehran.

Since the election of President Nicolas Sarkozy, France has considerably toughened its position towards Iran and called for new sanctions to oblige Tehran to suspend its uranium enrichment programme.

Iran on Wednesday summoned the French charge d'affaires in Tehran to express its "dissatisfaction with France's recent positions and negative tone."

Series of bombings kill 18 in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

Series of bombings in Iraq yesterday killed at least 18 people, including town mayor, the day after the Polish ambassador narrowly survived an attack in the capital.

The mayor of Iskandariyah, a mixed Shia-Sunni town 60 kilometres south of Baghdad, was killed by a roadside bomb along with one of his bodyguards on his way to work, police said.

An improvised explosive device planted at the side of the road exploded while the vehicle of Abbas al-Khafaji, mayor of the district, was passing by, killing him and one of his bodyguards while heading to his office.

Two other car bombs also exploded in the Iraqi capital, killing at least seven people, interior ministry and defence officials said.

A bomb in a minibus exploded in Al-Zafaraniyah in southeastern Baghdad, killing four people and wounding eight, while another killed three and wounded eight in Garage Amara in the centre of the capital.

Separately, gunmen killed police Brigadier General Ihsan Abdul Karim in a drive-by shooting as he left his home in Babel, south of Baghdad, police said.

The wave of attacks comes the day after Poland's ambassador narrowly survived an assassination attempt in Baghdad that left one Polish bodyguard and two Iraqis dead.

Three roadside bombs, timed to go off at short intervals, ripped through ambassador Edward Pietrzyk's convoy on Wednesday as he left his residence in the Al-Arasat neighbourhood.

But Polish Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski said his country would not withdraw the 900 troops it has stationed southwest of Baghdad, saying "desertion is always the worst option."

Poland was a solid supporter of the United States in the run-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq and supplied troops to the US-led coalition that have continued their deployment ever since.

A total of 21 Polish soldiers have been killed in Iraq since the conflict began.



Finnish Under Secretary of state at the ministry of foreign affairs Marjatta Rasi (L) poses with Nepalese Prime Minister Girja Prasad Koirala during a meeting in Kathmandu yesterday. Rasi on a five-day visit to Nepal to take stock of its current situation and to discuss bilateral assistance.

Lanka won't allow UN envoy to visit rebel-held areas

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka said yesterday it would not allow the United Nations human rights envoy to visit rebel-held areas in the island's north.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, is due in Sri Lanka next week to assess the island's deteriorating rights record, while the UN's top torture investigator, Manfred Novak, is already in the country.

But Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe said "neither Novak or Madam Louise Arbour can visit Kilinochchi," the de facto capital of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The minister said the Tigers could use the visit for propaganda and that security was a concern.

"Visiting foreign dignitaries are free to travel to other parts of the country to get a first-hand idea of what's happening on the ground," Samarasinghe told reporters.

Rights groups accuse the government and the LTTE of gross rights abuses, extra-judicial killings and scores of disappearances of civilians and political activists.

Sri Lanka narrowly avoided censure at the United Nations Human Rights Council last month with the UN body putting off a decision to review the island's rights record.

In July, London-based rights group Amnesty International said hundreds of people disappeared in Sri Lanka in the past year and more than 5,700 cases from the past three decades were under UN review.

Rights groups have said that abuses have increased in tandem with an escalation of fighting between troops and the Tamil Tiger rebels.

The pro-rebel North East Secretariat on Human Rights said this week that 2,812 Tamil civilians had been killed and 947 "disappeared" in the embattled areas since 2002.

Sri Lanka has also been rapped by local and international rights groups for allegedly colluding with a breakaway Tamil rebel faction known as the Karuna group, which has been implicated in the recruitment of child soldiers.

Pro-Taliban militants kill 3 abducted Pak soldiers

AFP, Peshawar

Pro-Taliban militants holding more than 200 Pakistani soldiers in a troubled tribal region near the Afghan border shot dead three of their captives yesterday, officials said.

The troops were abducted in insurgency-hit South Waziristan district in late August in a major blow to the military, which has around 90,000 soldiers fighting al-Qaeda and Taliban rebels on the frontier.

The militants had threatened on Wednesday to kill three of the soldiers daily to put pressure on the government to halt military operations in the rugged region.

"The bodies of three soldiers were found in the town of Jandola early Thursday when people woke up to take their pre-dawn Ramadan meal," a security official told AFP.

"They were wearing military uniforms and had been shot in the head," he said.

Around 30 soldiers have been

freed in recent weeks on the intervention of tribal peace committees, or jirgas.

But they started killing the soldiers after government took action against "innocent" people following a suicide attack on a military convoy last week in which three soldiers were injured, a militant spokesman said.

"The government has sabotaged the jirga process by launching an operation against innocent people," Zulfikar Mahsud, the spokesman of local militant commander Baitullah Mahsud said.

"We will start beheading three soldiers every day and intensify attacks on security forces in different cities of the country if operations continue in the region," Mahsud said.

Pakistan has been rocked by a string of deadly militant attacks, many of them targeting security forces, since troops staged a bloody raid on the al-Qaeda-linked Red Mosque in Islamabad in July.



Myanmar students hold a flower basket with a picture of slain Japanese journalist Kenji Nagai during a memorial ceremony at the Japanese embassy in Bangkok yesterday. Nagai was killed when the Myanmar government sent troops to quell protests in Yangon on September 27.

No al-Qaeda safe havens in Pakistan, says Musharraf

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf on Wednesday said there were no al-Qaeda safe havens in his country but admitted some of the extremists were hiding in tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

Musharraf, a key US ally in the "war on terror", is under pressure to wipe out militants who launch attacks on coalition forces in Afghanistan from the rugged tribal belt.

"al-Qaeda are definitely there,"

some in tribal agencies of South and North Waziristan and Bajaur. They are hiding and they are attacked whenever there is intelligence about their presence," Musharraf told private Geo television.


The president shrugged off a recent call for jihad or holy war against him by al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, saying he did not fear death as he had narrowly escaped several assassination attempts and was an experienced soldier himself.

"I have seen death very closely

several times. Allah saved me. Our entire training is jihad and it is jihad versus jihad. I have fought wars and seen bullets," Musharraf said.

Musharraf, who has deployed around 90,000 troops along the rugged frontier with Afghanistan to check militants, said al-Qaeda had not regrouped in the area as claimed by some outside observers.

"Some say they have safe havens, you can say hideouts, because haven means sanctuary," he said.



Asian Development Bank

Good Governance Program Request for Expression of Interest

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is assisting the Government of Bangladesh to implement a set of policy reforms packaged under the Good Governance Program. The objectives of the Program are to (i) strengthen the ongoing consensus building on good governance, integrity, and anticorruption reforms; (ii) support judicial reforms with a focus on the transparency and accountability of the judiciary; (iii) strengthen the role and reach of the Anticorruption Commission so that it can better fight corruption; and (iv) bring good governance and anticorruption initiatives into the mainstream within selected sectoral level agencies to enhance their effectiveness. There are two executing agencies (EAs) for the Program: the Supreme Court will be the EA for the program focus on strengthening the judiciary while the Cabinet Division will be the EA for all other activities.

The policy program is supported by a technical assistance grant from ADB and Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA) that will support Government to enhance the capability of relevant agencies to implement the policy reforms, and to more effectively manage the Program.

The Good Governance Program, which will be implemented over a period of four years, is looking for three individuals (Bangladeshi nationals) to help manage the Program. Detailed terms of reference with titles are indicated below:

- 1. Program Manager (48 months, full time)**, to be based at the Cabinet Division; responsibilities include:
 - (i) assist in coordinating Program management work related to the executive branch of government, including helping implement the National Integrity Strategy (NIS);
 - (ii) assist in conducting all relevant evaluations of Program components;
 - (iii) liaise with government agencies on policy reforms and actions required to achieve the Program outcomes; coordinate the work of other national and international consultants on various components of the Program, and ensure timely implementation of the Program outputs and activities;
 - (iv) take responsibility for all reporting arrangements in the Program, and submit reports to the Cabinet Division and ADB as and when required;
 - (v) prepare and maintain a Program Performance Information System to track Program progress;
 - (vi) assist in the procurement of consulting services, equipment, and training services in the implementing agencies as per ADB guidelines; and
 - (vii) take on any other tasks identified by the Cabinet Division and ADB that may be necessary to ensure that the Program is implemented effectively, and that Program scheduling is maintained.
- 2. Deputy Program Manager (first 24 months, full time)**, to be based at the Cabinet Division. The terms of reference of the Deputy Program Manager are to assist the Program Manager in all the responsibilities that are specified above. He/she will be reporting to the Program Coordinator at the Executing Agency through the Program Manager.
- 3. Program Manager (48 months, full time)**, to be based at the Office of the Registrar, Supreme Court; responsibilities include:
 - (i) assist the Office of the Registrar in coordinating Program management work related to the judiciary, including liaising with the experts at the Judicial Service Commission and Judicial Pay Commission to ensure Program outcomes;
 - (ii) provide support to Supreme Court in the process and management of the asset and wealth declarations in the judiciary;
 - (iii) assist the Supreme Court and district courts, as necessary, to implement the policy of separation of the judiciary from the executive;
 - (iv) provide support in the preparation of the annual "State of the Judiciary" report;
 - (v) assist in the procurement of consulting services, equipment, and training services in the judiciary-related implementing agencies as per ADB guidelines;
 - (vi) follow up on disseminating action resulting from any citizen report card exercises related to the Program; coordinate, and provide guidance to, the work of other consultants and experts to be brought into the Program for support to timely implementation of Program components related to the judiciary;
 - (vii) be responsible for all reporting arrangements in the Program as they relate to the judiciary; and prepare and maintain a Program Performance Information System at the Office of the Registrar to track Program progress;
 - (viii) take on any other tasks that may be necessary to ensure that the Program is implemented effectively in the judiciary, and that all policy actions related to the judiciary are well on their way to being met by the milestone dates.

For the two Program Manager positions, the successful candidate will have at least 8 years of experience in managing projects and programs in the public sector, will have had suitable academic qualifications (but no less than a post-graduate degree in the fields of public administration, governance, law, and other similar areas); will be familiar with the government's anticorruption policies and programs as well as how government agencies function; will have demonstrated ability in writing effectively; and will have extensive knowledge of the sector in which he/she will be working.

For the Deputy Program Manager position, similar conditions apply except for at least 5 years of professional experience.

Further information on the details of the Program is available from the ADB website www.adb.org. Applications are invited from interested individuals by 31 October 2007; please send in an updated CV, along with a statement on how you meet the requirements and the names and contact information of two referees who are familiar with your professional capabilities. Please forward your application to either of these two individuals:

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