

12 bodies unearthed in Iraq mass grave

AP, Baghdad

A mass grave with the remains of 12 people, including a paramedic who disappeared more than a year ago, was unearthed in an area long controlled by al-Qaeda in Iraq, officials said.

In the capital, an Interior Ministry aide was gunned down in his car, police said.

Two of the decomposed bodies were beheaded, according to an official at Fallujah General Hospital, where the bodies were taken after their discovery on Sunday.

Hospital officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not permitted to release details of the discovery, said some appeared to have been killed as recently as four months ago, and some of the deaths dated to 18 months ago.

Along with the bodies was a Health Ministry card that belonged to the missing paramedic, according to footage from AP Television News.

Iraqi troops unearthed the bodies Sunday afternoon near Lake Tharthar, an area about 60 miles northwest of Baghdad where several mass graves were found in recent months. Since ousting extremists in some of the country's most violent areas, Iraqis from both Islamic sects have stepped up their patrols for the missing, leading to more discoveries.

Two other mass graves were found near the lake last month, one containing 40 bodies and another with 29 bodies. Elsewhere last month, a grave containing 17 corpses was unearthed near Baquba, 35 miles northeast of Baghdad. Officials said at the time the bodies were likely those of people seized at fake checkpoints and killed because of their sectarian affiliation.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte on Sunday pressed leaders of Iraq's religious and ethnic factions to take advantage of recent security gains to push through legislation aimed at cementing national reconciliation or risk a return to greater violence.

"If progress is not made on these fronts we risk falling back to the more violent patterns of the past," Negroponte said at a news conference in Baghdad.

The U.S. military has said violence in Iraq has fallen to lows not seen since January 2006, but top American commanders have warned that Sunni and Shiite extremists still pose a serious threat.

In Baghdad, men in two cars fired on a Sunni Interior Ministry aide, Maj. Gen. Fauzi Hussein Muhammed, as he returned home, killing him and wounding his driver, police said. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release details of the attack. The Interior Ministry could not immediately be reached for comment.

The mutilated bodies of four guards at an oil facility who were kidnapped at a checkpoint on their way back from vacation were found north of Baghdad on Monday, said Col. Khalil al-Zubaidi, an army spokesman in Kirkuk. A fifth man who disappeared with them remained missing, he said.

Political progress has been elusive, with lawmakers clashing over Kurdish oil deals with foreign companies and a draft bill that would allow thousands of former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party to return to their government jobs. Both measures are among the 18 benchmarks set by the Bush's administration to

Rehabilitation

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In rehabilitation, he said, priority has been given primarily to crop, agriculture, fishing and livestock to ensure the livelihoods of the affected people.

Terming the people of the affected areas very courageous and resilient, he said they have started earning their livelihoods with a fresh zeal.

He hoped that the cyclone victims would succeed in their struggle as they did in the past in facing such natural calamities if supports of the government and all others continue for them.

Yesterday's donors include former adviser to the caretaker government SM

Shahjahan, ICDDR,B Executive Director Charles Larson, Regional Head and CEO of the State Bank of India, Dhaka, Debarata Dutta, Country manager of Habib Bank Ltd, Dhaka, Abdul Hye, Chairman of Bangladesh General Insurance Co Ltd Touhid Samad, Additional Secretary of the Finance Division and Chairman of Rupali Bank Ltd Fazlul Karim, Deputy Secretary of the Commerce

Ministry and Administrator of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies Abu Bakker Siddiqi Molliah, Secretary General of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry MA Matin, Head of Corporate Affairs of Standard Chartered Bank Osman Morad and Chairman of South East Bank Ltd Alamgir Kabir.

encourage reconciliation.

Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani, using unusually strong language, told Iraqi state television late Sunday in August, and moved to the contracts signed by the self-rule Kurdish region were illegal.

"No region has the right to go alone and sign a deal," he said. "This will lead to the breakup of Iraq ... oil is the business of the federal government and any attempt at extracting oil without the approval of the federal government is tantamount to smuggling."

Jamal Abdullah, a spokesman for the regional government of Iraqi Kurdistan, said al-Shahristani's comments were unwarranted: "No one has the right to slander the legitimacy of contracts signed by the government of Kurdistan and the foreign companies."

A Sunni Arab lawmaker on Monday denounced laws barring former Saddam supporters from government jobs, saying they amount to "racism" and are aimed at punishing members of the minority Islamic sect.

Mutlaq al-Jubouri, a former deputy prime minister, said the committee to purge government institutions of high-level members of Saddam's ruling Baath Party was established only to punish the Sunnis.

This committee was founded to uproot the Baath Party, but rather to uproot a section of the Iraqi people, "al-Jubouri said.

In a hopeful sign for political progress, lawmakers from Iraq's largest Sunni Arab bloc on Monday ended their boycott of parliament over the "house arrest" of their leader, Adnan al-Dulaimi, who also attended the session.

Sheikh Selim

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from the government met Selim and asked him to give a confession before a court. They also told him that he would be acquitted if he made deposition as a prover in the case, the petition said.

The AL leader was produced before a court on June 18 with a two-day remand prayer, and he was remanded. Blindfolded, he was once again taken to an unknown place where some persons interrogated him on different issues, misbehaved with him and tortured him physically and mentally.

During interrogation, he was again asked to make a confessional statement. As he refused, the interrogators threatened him saying that if he did not agree to their proposal, they would go for recovering firearms from his possession, Selim alleged in his petition.

"We have received a list of three persons to get them caught in crossfire but I do not know as yet whether the list contains your name," Selim said quoting one of the interrogators.

Anyone would be forced to give a confessional statement in the circumstances he had made the statement, the former minister said.

The retraction petition mentioned that even the BNP-led four-party alliance while in power could not bring any charges against Selim. Now, a baseless and cooked up charge was brought against him as part of a conspiracy, it said.

"I am withdrawing the confessional statement I have given in the case," Selim said in the petition.

Advocate Syed Rezaul Rahman read out the petition on behalf of Selim as the court did not permit the accused to read it out.

India hands over

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Abdullah Aref, additional superintendent of CID, said they have placed the two under arrest under section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code. "We will produce them before a court with a prayer for remand to interrogate them intensively," he said.

Asked if the government has discussed the proposed Truth Commission issue with the ACC, Mashhud replied in the negative.

Both Rafiq and Jewel were involved in criminal activities during their stay in Kolkata, added the sources. Indian authorities decided to deport them as their jail term ended recently.

On October 7, infamous criminal Habibur Rahman Taj and his accomplices Sohel alias Ibrahim and Biplob Rahman alias Lambi Selim had also been deported by India.

Sources in the CID said efforts are on to bring back six non-criminals who are currently under detention of Kolkata police.

Around 350 criminals are believed to be hiding in different locations in West Bengal, India, the sources also said.

Army suggests

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2007 promulgated on August 9 empowered the EC to formulate rules on electoral roll. Earlier, the power to formulate such rules lay with the government.

The EC started the field level task for making voter list with photo-graphs in August, and moved to formulate the draft rules in October.

The draft rules provide that the EC will register prisoners and detainees, including former prime ministers Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, and other political bigwigs, as voters on completion of registering general people of the area where the prisoners and detainees are kept.

This is for the first time the EC is not considering detained BNP chief Khaleda and Awami League chief Selim as very important persons (VIPs) to be registered as voters. In the past, the EC usually began the task listing Khaleda and Hasina as voters.

The army headquarters also echoed the EC's views on listing prisoners and detainees as voters.

In the draft rules, the EC said that in consultation with the authorities, mobile teams will have to be sent to jails, or where detainees are kept, to take photographs and fingerprints of the prisoners and detained people for listing them as voters.

The army headquarters suggested that the prisoners and detained individuals should be considered as residents of the areas where they would live if not imprisoned or detained. And they must not be registered as voters in the areas where they are being kept.

The EC at a meeting on Saturday discussed the draft rules and suggestions given by the army.

Sacked staffs

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investigation conducted by the Sylhet divisional commissioner.

Policemen have been deployed at the SCC to avert any untoward incident.

DU teachers

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Department Chairman Prof Neem Chandra Bhowmik on September 9 for instigating violence on the university campus and at Shahbagh in the capital on August 22 and 23.

DU student Moniruzzaman, who was arrested earlier, is now in jail custody. Other accused university students are on the run.

They are DU unit Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) President Hasan Mamun and its General Secretary Saiful Islam Firoz, JCD leader Kamruddin Kochi, acting JCD President of Shamsunnahar Hall unit Tanjeen Chowdhury Lili, JCD President of Rokeya Hall unit Shahnoor Nargis, central Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) Vice-President Aparna Rani Pal, Rifat Hossain Jiku, Nazrul Islam Russell, Shamsul Kabir Rahat, Mitul, Aziz Hasan, Rokonuzzaman, Kamruzzaman and Anwar Hossain.

Earlier, the court issued arrest warrant against them and ordered to attach their properties as they have been absconding since the case was filed.

DU Vice-chancellor Prof SMA Faiz will meet Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed and Army Chief Gen Moeen U Ahmed today to discuss different issues including release of the detained university students and teachers.

"We shall meet the chief adviser and the army chief at their respective offices tomorrow to discuss the release of our detained teachers and students, and other university related issues," Prof Faiz said.

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Bringing back

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Hasina appears

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before the hearing yesterday.

Zillur appeared before the court as a lawyer for the first time yesterday in the last 35 years since he had first contested in a general election.

"She also claimed her innocence," Zillur said after the defence lawyers' meeting with the detained former prime minister.

THE CASE

Hasina's sister Shekha Rehana is also accused in the case, who has been residing abroad since before being implicated.

On November 28, the court directed the jail authorities to produce Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim before it yesterday.

The trial of Sheikh Rehana will be held in absentia, as she has not surrendered to the court yet.

The government on November 25 decided to try the case under the special arrangement.

The law ministry issued a gazette notification under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) on November 26 regarding the special arrangement fixing the premises of the parliament building in the capital as the venue for the trial.

Azam J Chowdhury, managing director of Eastcoast Trading Pvt Ltd, filed the case against Hasina and Selim with Gulshan police station on June 13 this year, accusing them of extorting Tk 2.99 crore from him.

The investigation officer (IO) of the case later included Sheikh Rehana's name in the charge sheet submitted on July 24 following an investigation.

The court accepted the charge sheet issuing an arrest warrant for Rehana and ordering confiscation of her properties.

Law enforcement agencies arrested Hasina on July 16 and produced her before a magistrate court, which sent her to the sub-jail.

Advocate ABM Sharuddin Khan Mukul was appointed the chief public prosecutor (PP) while Borhan Uddin, Golam Kibria, Syed Ahsan Habib, and Shahidul Islam Sardar were appointed to assist Mukul during the trial.

SUPREME COURT ORDER

A six-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice M Ruhul Amin stayed the HC order which had declared illegal the ACC notice to Hasina.

The defence lawyers said as the judiciary is independent now, only the court has the right to decide how the case will be tried. They said the government cannot issue such an order, if necessary only the SC can direct what to be done with the case.

The prosecution however argued that the law has a provision enabling the government to issue the order.

The defence lawyers told the court of Judge Mohammad Azizul Haque that the government is not interfering into Awami League president Sheikh Hasina's case.

"No one is above law and everyone is equal in the eyes of law," he told reporters after a meeting at the housing and public works ministry.

Mainul said the court will decide whether or not Sheikh Hasina is guilty. "If the court finds her guilty, she will be punished. Otherwise, she will be acquitted."

About Hasina's claim of her innocence, Mainul said everybody claims it before the court.

Expressing deep concern over the fairness of the trial, the defence lawyers told the court that sending of the case from court to court by the government proves that the independence of the judiciary still remains only in books while the entire world is waiting to see a truly separated and independent judiciary, especially in connection with a case against a former premier.

The defence lawyers also petitioned the court for a limited stay on the case proceedings until a writ is filed with the HC and the matter is settled.

At that point Public Prosecutor ABM Sharuddin Khan Mukul told the court that the jail killing case was also tried in different places and the venue for Hasina's trial was fixed keeping in mind her and her lawyers' security concerns.

The defence lawyers mentioned that the matter of trying the case under the special arrangement is currently being disputed in the HC.

They also argued that a judge cannot operate from two offices simultaneously nor can a court be convened at more than one place during a period of time making the special court convened on the premises of the parliament building illegal.

At that point the court issued an order saying it has the jurisdiction to proceed with the current arrangement.

As the court prepared to pass an order, the defence lawyers prayed for time to scrutinise the supplementary charge sheet submitted by the ACC.

The court finally fixed December 9 for the hearing on charge framing and permitted 20 defence lawyers to talk to Hasina yesterday.

Hasing was taken back to the sub-jail at 1:05pm, after the hearing had been