

Corruption watchdog slams Indonesian president

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has failed to honour election promises to crack down on widespread graft after the first 100 days of his new government, a watchdog said yesterday.

Transparency International representative Teten Masduki said the ex-general's pledges to turn the tide of corruption now appeared to be little more than populist sloganeering designed to win last July's election.

"We are disappointed with SBY's 100-day programme. The government's attention to the eradication of corruption... is weakening, riddled with controversy and disorientated," he told reporters, using Yudhoyono's nickname.

"The issue of fighting corruption in Indonesia is being exploited for populist purposes, rather than for finding steps to make concrete and measured changes."

Yudhoyono has won two elections since 2004 on the back of promises to root out corruption, which riddles every aspect of Indonesian public life from the courts to the customs office.

Taiwan's arms sale test for US-China ties

AP, Beijing

China criticized the US yesterday ahead of the expected announcement of new arms sales to Taiwan, the latest in a series of disputes raising tensions between Washington and Beijing.

The US administration has been consulting with Congress ahead of a formal announcement of the sale, which is likely to include Black Hawk helicopters and Patriot missiles, senior US congressional aides told The Associated Press.

China opposes all arms sales to the island it considers a renegade province and will likely suspend US military exchanges in response.



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqis inspect the destroyed vehicle of a suicide bomber outside Iraq's forensics headquarters in central Baghdad on Tuesday. A suicide attacker blew up his vehicle as he raced it at Iraq's forensics headquarters in Baghdad, killing 18 people, injuring 80 and destroying the building, officials said.

Suicide car bomb rocks Baghdad, 18 killed

AP, Baghdad

A suicide car bomber killed at least 18 and injured dozens more yesterday in a strike against a police crime lab in central Baghdad, a day after several hotels were hit by suicide attacks, officials said.

Rescue crews are still combing through the rubble looking for casualties. Officials say the majority of those killed were likely police officers who worked in the forensic investigation office at Tahariyat Square in the central neighbourhood of Karradah. At least 82 people were reported injured.

This week's bombings all against prominent and heavily fortified targets dealt yet another blow to the image of an Iraqi government struggling to answer for security lapses that have allowed bombers to carry out a number of massive attacks in the heart of the capital since August.

Police and hospital officials said the bomber in Tuesday's attack tried to drive a pickup truck through a checkpoint and blast walls protecting the forensic evidence office.

Among those confirmed killed were 12 police officers and six civilians who were visiting the office. Officials said more than half the wounded were police.

Shortly after the bombing, rescue teams in blue jumpsuits combed through the debris of the partially damaged three-story building as a crane removed some of the 10-foot, 7-ton concert blast walls toppled by the blast.

The office targeted in the attack mainly deals with data collected during criminal investigations, including fingerprints and other pieces of evidence. The office is located next to the Interior Ministry's major crimes office, which deals with terrorism cases.

Government offices have been frequent targets of major attacks in the capital since blasts struck the foreign and finance ministries in August, raising questions about the ability of Iraqi security forces to keep the country safe. While the criminal evidence offices have not been targeted by a major suicide bombing before, attackers have struck nearby.

French MPs report 'to back burka ban'

BBC Online

A French parliamentary committee is expected to recommend a partial ban on women wearing the full Islamic veil.

The committee is thought to see the burka as an affront to French values and will propose a ban in hospitals, schools and transport, AFP reports.

France has been debating whether to ban the full body veil - known as the burka - with President Nicolas Sarkozy recently speaking out against them.

The interior ministry says just 1,900 women in France wear the burka.

Speaking earlier this month, Sarkozy said the burka was "not welcome in France".

However, he did not explicitly call for a ban, saying "no one should feel stigmatised" by any eventual law.

Opinion polls suggest a majority of French people support a full ban.

However, the parliamentary deputies are expected to recommend that - for now - restrictions should be limited, the BBC's Hugh Schofield reports from Paris.

The committee will suggest a ban inside public buildings, with those who defy the ban denied whatever services are on offer there - for example state benefits, our correspondent says.

The issue has divided France's political parties.

The Socialist opposition has come out officially against a ban, saying it would be difficult to enforce. It says it is opposed to the burka in principle, but some members have expressed fears about any ruling that could stigmatise Muslim women.

Meanwhile, the head of Sarkozy's right-wing UMP party has already presented a bill in parliament supporting a full ban on grounds of security.

The committee's report is expected to be followed by the drafting of a bill and a parliamentary debate on the issue.

China sentences 4 to death in Xinjiang

AFP, Beijing

A court in China's Xinjiang region sentenced four people to death over deadly riots in July, bringing to 26 the number of those condemned to die for the unrest, a government official said yesterday.

The verdicts were handed down on Monday by a court in the regional capital Urumqi, scene of the violence that pitted mainly Muslim Uighur against China's Han ethnic majority, leaving nearly 200 dead and over 1,600 injured.

"They were sentenced yesterday by the Urumqi Intermediate Court," a spokesman at the Xinjiang government, who gave only his surname, Li, told AFP.

"Four people were sentenced to death, one was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve and eight others got prison terms of up to life."

A death sentence with a reprieve is normally commuted to life in prison.

Monday's sentences brought to 26 the number of people who have been reported executed or condemned to die over their roles in the unrest, some of the worst ethnic violence in China in decades.

LEBANON PLANE CRASH Search for bodies and black boxes

Rescuers scour Lebanon coast for crash victims

AFP, Beirut

Rescuers yesterday combed the waters off the coast of Lebanon for victims and the black boxes of an Ethiopian airliner that crashed into the sea, with officials offering little hope of finding survivors.

Information Minister Tarek Mitri told AFP that salvage crews had worked through the night and were confident of

identifying the area where the plane went down.

"They are scanning the area where the black boxes and the corpses are to be found and there should be significant progress today," Mitri said, adding that improved weather should facilitate the search operations.

Ethiopia Airlines Flight 409 tumbled in a ball of fire into the Mediterranean early Monday just minutes after takeoff from

Beirut airport in stormy weather.

The Boeing 737-800 bound for Addis Ababa had 90 passengers on board. All are presumed dead.

Rescuers yesterday scoured Lebanon's coast for victims and the flight recorders of an Ethiopian airliner that plunged flaming into the sea, with officials offering little hope of finding survivors.

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Bin Laden tape shows Qaeda 'greatly weakened': Obama

AFP, Washington

An audio message in which Osama bin Laden seemed to take credit for a failed bombing attempt on a US airliner showed the al-Qaeda leader has been "weakened," President Barack Obama said in an interview broadcast yesterday.

While Obama said there is "no doubt" that a terror threat persists, "al-Qaeda, itself, is greatly weakened from where it was back in 2000," he said.

"Bin Laden sending out a tape, trying to take credit for a Nigerian student, who engaged in a failed bombing attempt, is an indication of how weakened he is, because this is not something necessarily directed by him," Obama told ABC television.

Israel shuns UN call for Gaza war probe

AP, Jerusalem

A Cabinet minister says Israel won't set up an independent panel to investigate the Gaza war as the UN urged.

The General Assembly called on Israel and "the Palestinian side" to conduct "independent, credible" investigations into last winter's fighting in Gaza. It expected a decision by February 5.

Minister Yuli Edelstein said yesterday that a document, which Israel will submit to the UN this week, deals only with Israel's own investigations of the war.

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The Consultants will be required to conduct training on support of livelihoods through micro-enterprises to women members of 388 UPs at six districts (Barguna, Feni, Habiganj, Narsingdi, Satkhira and Sirajganj) during April to July 2010, and to prepare the training module.

For complete Terms of Reference and application instructions please visit our website: <http://www.undp.org.bd/jobs>. Only online applications will be received until 10 February 2010.



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