

Death toll in 2009 lowest since Iraq invasion

AFP, Baghdad

The number of people killed across Iraq in December was 367 and the civilian death toll in 2009 was 2,800, making the year the least violent since the US-led invasion of 2003, officials said yesterday.

According to figures from the defence, interior and health ministries, 306 civilians, 48 police officers and 13 soldiers were killed last month. In addition, 48 insurgents were killed and another 635 arrested.

The figures put the number of wounded during the month at 1,288.

December's toll was three times higher than the previous month, which was the least violent since 2003 with 122 killed.

Mousavi ready to die for defending right to protest

AP, Tehran

Iran's opposition leader yesterday pledged to remain defiant in the face of new threats including calls by hard-liners for his execution and said he was ready to sacrifice his life in defence of the people's right to protest peacefully against the government.

Mir Hossein Mousavi's remarks come after the worst unrest since the immediate aftermath of the disputed June presidential election. At least eight people died during anti-government protests on Sunday, including Mousavi's nephew.

In one of his strongest statements to date, Mousavi said he was "ready for martyrdom" the sacrifice of one's life for a higher cause and lashed out at the bloody crackdown the authorities are waging against the opposition.

He said the government was making more mistakes by resorting to violence and killings, and that it must accept the people's rights to hold peaceful demonstrations.

Iranian hard-liners have called for the execution of Mousavi and other opposition figures, while a previously unknown group claimed in an online posting that suicide squads were ready to assassinate opposition leaders should the judiciary fail to punish them within a week.

Iran's state prosecutor on Thursday warned opposition leaders could be put on trial if they

don't denounce this week's anti-government protests.

"I explicitly and clearly state that an order to execute, murder and imprison (opposition leaders) ... won't resolve the problem," Mousavi said in a statement on his Web site, Kalemeh. "I'm not afraid to be one of the martyrs people have offered in the struggle for their just demands."

The confrontation between clerical rulers and their opponents returned to the streets in recent weeks, after a harsh crackdown immediately following the June 12 balloting all but crushed the opposition movement.

One of those killed in clashes Sunday between security forces and opposition protesters was Mousavi's nephew, Ali Mousavi. He was gunned down but authorities claimed police didn't use firearms and said the nephew was "assassinated" by unknown assailants.

The nephew was buried Wednesday in a hastily organised ceremony that was attended by the opposition leader and other family members. Authorities had taken the body from the hospital earlier in the week in what was seen as an attempt to prevent the funeral from turning into another pro-opposition protest.

Hard-liners have become especially furious after some pro-opposition protesters chanted slogans against Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei a taboo in Iran, where the supreme leader is considered answerable only to god.



Fireworks light the sky celebrating the New Year at the Erasmus Bridge in Rotterdam in Netherlands yesterday while a girl wears "2010" glasses in Times Square in New York City (Inset).

PHOTO: AFP

Iraq expresses astonishment over dropping of Blackwater case

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq expressed astonishment yesterday over the dropping of charges against Blackwater guards accused of killing 14 civilians in 2007, one of the bloodiest incidents involving a private security firm here.

The decision by a US judge to dismiss the criminal charges also sparked outrage among Iraqis and Baghdad's government spokesman vowed that it would "act forcefully and decisively to prosecute the Blackwater criminals".

"I was astonished by this decision," Human Rights Minister Wejdan Mikhail told AFP. "There was so much work done to prosecute these people and to take this case into court and I don't understand why the judge took this decision."

US federal judge Ricardo Urbina on Thursday dismissed the charges against the five, saying prosecutors violated their rights by using incriminating statements they had made under immunity during a State Department probe to build their case.

The case was among the most sensational that sought to hold Blackwater employees accountable for what was seen as a culture of lawlessness and a lack of accountability as it carried out its duties in Iraq.

N Korea calls for end to hostilities with US

AP, Seoul

North Korea called for an end of hostile relations with the United States in a New Year's message Friday and said it was committed to making the Korean peninsula nuclear-free through negotiations.

Communist North Korea has long demanded that Washington end hostility toward its government, and said it developed nuclear weapons to deter a US attack. Washington has repeatedly said it has no intention of invading the country.

Revellers ring in new decade hoping for prosperity in 2010

AP, Paris

Paris jazzed up the Eiffel Tower with a multicoloured, disco-style light display as the world basked in New Year's festivities with hopes that 2010 and beyond will bring more peace and prosperity.

From fireworks over Sydney's famous bridge to balloons sent aloft in Tokyo, revellers across the globe at least temporarily shelved worries about the future to bid farewell to "The Noughties" a bitter-sweet nickname for the first decade of the 21st century playing on a term for "zero" and evoking the word naughty.

In New York City, hundreds of thousands of revellers gathered in chilly weather in Times Square to usher in the new decade. Organisers were preparing 3,000 pounds (1,360 kilograms) of confetti that will be scattered when the New Year's Eve crystal ball drops at midnight.

Fireworks were set off at about 6 p.m. and the gigantic ball was lowered into place in preparation for midnight. Many people wore conical party hats and 2010 glasses that blinked colourfully, and some were jumping up and down to keep warm the National Weather Service said the

temperature will be in the low 30s and forecast snow for around midnight.

Las Vegas prepared to welcome some 315,000 revellers with fireworks from casino rooftops, a traffic-free Las Vegas Strip and toasts at nightclubs from celebrities including actress Eva Longoria and rapper 50 Cent.

Even as some major stock market indexes rose in 2009, the financial downturn hit hard, sending many industrial economies into recession, tossing millions out of work and out of their homes as foreclosures rose dramatically in some countries.



PHOTO: AFP

A picture shows Burj Dubai, the world's tallest tower, in the Gulf emirate yesterday. Once-bustling Dubai will open the world's tallest skyscraper on January 4, boasting new limits in design and construction, hopeful of polishing an image tarnished by the debt woes afflicting the Gulf emirate.

Dubai to open world's tallest building Monday

AFP, Dubai

Once-bustling Dubai will open the world's tallest skyscraper on Monday, boasting new limits in design and construction, hopeful of polishing an image tarnished by the debt woes afflicting the Gulf emirate.

Emaar, the giant property firm part-owned by the government and which developed the needle-shaped concrete, steel and glass structure, has declined to reveal Burj Dubai's exact height.

Apparently wanting to maintain the suspense, the company will say only that the tower exceeds 800 metres (2,640 feet), putting it far higher than Taiwan's Taipei 101 tower (508 metres).

Bill Baker, a structural and civil engineer and partner in Chicago-based Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM), which designed the tower, said Burj Dubai has set a new benchmark.

"We thought that it would be slightly taller than the existing tallest tower of Taipei 101. (Emaar) kept on asking us to go higher but we didn't know how high we could go," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian supporters of the secular Fatah movement hold portraits of former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (L) and current President Mahmud Abbas (2nd L) in the West Bank city of Nablus on Thursday during a rally marking start of the party's 45th anniversary of armed struggle.

Qaeda threat looms into new decade, warns Brown

AFP, London

The failed Detroit plane bombing showed that terrorism remains a "very real" global threat as the world enters a new decade eight years after 9/11, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown warned yesterday.

World leaders needed to

cooperate "urgently" to tighten security at airports and on aircraft following the December 25 attack in which a 23-year-old Nigerian nearly downed a US jet as it prepared to land, he said.

"The new decade is starting as the last began -- with al-Qaeda creating a climate of fear," he wrote, saying the

failed bombing had "exposed an evolving terrorist threat" and highlighted "a major new base for terrorism."

"The failed attack in Detroit on Christmas Day reminds us of a deeper reality: that almost 10 years after September 11th international terrorism is still a very real threat," he added.

Hole in Moon may serve as lunar base for astronauts

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, London

In a major discovery, geophysicists have identified a vertical hole they believe is a skylight on the surface of the moon that could serve as a lunar base for astronauts.

The dark pit in an intact lava tube is located in the Marius Hills region, a volcanic area on the Moon, a report published in Geophysical Research Letters said.

The discovery was made using images from the moon-orbiting Japanese SELENE (also known as Kaguya) spacecraft. It was led by Junichi Haruyama of the NTT DATA CCS Corporation, Japan.

The scientists found that the nearly circular hole is about 65 metres (213 feet) in diameter and about 80-88 m (262-289 ft) deep and also concluded that the skylight most likely formed when part of the lava tube roof collapsed.

Lava tubes, which are commonly found on earth, are underground cave-like channels through which lava once flowed.

INDEPENDENT UNIVERSITY, BANGLADESH

MSc in Environment Management

Admission Spring 2010

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

A four-year Bachelor degree or equivalent in any branch of sciences and engineering with a minimum CGPA of 2.5 in the scale of 4

Candidates of other disciplines or of three year Bachelor degree holders may also join this program on prior completion at IUB of required prerequisite courses in order to be a regular student.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Financial Assistance:

- Meritorious students on the basis of their academic achievement in the 4 year's undergraduate or equivalent (CGPA ≥ 3.2 in the scale of 4) and an excellent command in communicative English and Mathematics will get 30% - 100% waiver on tuition fees on entry.
- 15% waiver on tuition fees for IUB Graduates on entry.
- Teaching/Research Assistantship on merit and on availability.
- 50% waiver on tuition fees for concurrently admitted sibling / spouse.

Payment: Tuition fees may be paid in installments.

Faculty: Highly qualified full time faculty members mostly Ph.D's from renowned universities of the world.

Degree Recognition: Degrees from IUB accepted globally for higher studies and job placement.

Classes: During weekend (Friday & Saturday) from 10am to 6pm

DURATION: 12 months for full time students and 24 months for part time students

APPLY ONLINE

Application Deadline: Thursday, 7th January, 2010

Interview: Monday, 11th January, 2010 at 10 a.m.

Admission: 12-14th January 2010

Classes begin: Friday, 22nd January, 2010

For more information visit the website: www.sesm.iub.edu.bd/msem or contact **M.Sc. in Environment Management Program Office**
House # 14, Road # 14, Room 204, Baridhara, Dhaka-1212
Phone - 9884498, 9881681, 9881917 and 9862386 - 90 Extn : 323, 222

www.iub.edu.bd

Panasonic ideas for life



Discover the world's slimmest Plasma TV at Dhaka International Trade Fair-2010.

It's all there at Pavilion 14. Excite yourself with our new range of Viera Plasma and LCD Series that brings to you an entire new viewing experience. With energy savings and eco-friendly products like air conditioners to home appliances and many more, get ready to immerse yourself in the marvel of innovation and quality.

Step in to the Panasonic Pavilion at the Dhaka International Trade Fair - 2010 and mesmerize yourself with the magical world of Panasonic.