

38 male Homs evacuees freed in Syria: Governor

AFP, Damascus

A group of 38 male evacuees from besieged parts of the Syrian city of Homs were released yesterday after investigation, leaving almost 200 others still being held, the provincial governor said.

The men and boys were among those detained by security services for questioning after being evacuated from the Old City of Homs by the UN and Red Crescent under a deal including a temporary ceasefire.

"They left the (processing) centre to the places they wanted to go to after their situations were resolved," governor Talal Barazi said of the 38 evacuees.

He told AFP that around 195 evacuees were still being held at the processing centre while investigations into their identity papers and military service status were being carried out.

The United Nations said earlier this week that some 380 male evacuees were still being held in processing centres, though it said some had been cleared for release but not yet left.

Barazi said many of the detainees were eager to take advantage of an amnesty offered last year to those who had failed to report for compulsory military service.

"Detainees have told us about their desire to settle their situations before being released because they were unable to take advantage of the amnesty while they were under siege," Barazi said.

He said evacuees over 42 would be automatically cleared because they were over the age for compulsory military service.

Beginning February 7, the United Nations and Red Crescent evacuated some 1,400 people trapped in besieged parts of Homs for more than 18 months as the Syrian regime battles rebels across the country.

Food was also delivered to those remaining behind, who had been forced to subsist on little more than olives and wild herbs.

All men and boys aged between 15-55 were taken for processing by security services, in a move that raised the

concern of UN officials.

They are present at the processing centre and have warned that the operation is being carefully monitored.

The evacuations and delivery of aid were made possible by a deal that included a tenuous truce that was twice extended but expired last Saturday with no agreement to extend it further.

On Wednesday, Barazi said a group of 11 civilians had been evacuated from part of Homs, but operations have otherwise largely ground to a halt.

The UN has said it is focusing on the processing of male evacuees before any additional evacuation or aid distribution operations resume.

"The UN is taking a pause to plan for the next round of evacuations given that a significant number of civilians in the Old City of Homs are reported to be more vulnerable and frail," UN humanitarian coordinator Yacoub El-Hillo told AFP.

"The focus of UN activities currently remains on providing protection services to evacuees -- men and boys --

Four killed in California shooting

AFP, Washington

A woman with a gun killed four people and critically wounded two others at a Native American community in northern California, media reports said.

Sherie Rhoades, 44, was held on suspicion of murder and attempted murder after the shootings Thursday at the Cedarville Rancheria Tribal Office in Alturas, NBC News quoted local police chief Ken Barnes saying.

The shootings occurred during a hearing to evict Rhoades and her son from the Rancheria, NBC said.

Two men aged 19 and 45 were killed, as were two men, ages 30 and 50, authorities said. Two other women were in critical condition.

Alturas is a town of about 2,800 in sparsely populated Modoc County, near the Oregon border.

Zimbabwe orders deportation of US ex-congressman

AFP, Harare

A Zimbabwean court yesterday ordered that former US congressman Melvin Reynolds be deported, after he pleaded guilty to flouting immigration laws for staying in the country on an expired visa.

The Harare magistrate's court ruled that Reynolds, a 62-year-old former congressman from Illinois, be expelled immediately after he pays a fine of \$100 or serves five days in prison.

Reynolds also faces a further charge of breaching Zimbabwe's tough pornography laws, a case that was set to be heard later yesterday.

The charge sheet against him said he "had in his possession an iPhone 4S cell phone which contained videos and pictures of naked women and men having sexual intercourse".

Reynolds, once seen as a rising star in US politics, stepped down from Congress in 1995 in disgrace after being convicted of statutory rape.

He was later convicted of bank fraud and served a prison sentence before being pardoned by then president Bill Clinton.

Two dead as Yemen disperses Aden independence protests

AFP, Aden

Yemeni forces shot dead one protester and wounded 16 others as they opened fire on defiant secessionist demonstrators in the southern city of Aden yesterday, hours after killing another.

Two years after the ouster of veteran strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh, secessionist leaders called for anniversary demonstrations to press their campaign for the restoration of the independence that the south enjoyed until union with the north in 1990.

Thousands of protesters marched on Aden's central government and diplomatic district of Khor Maksar after the main weekly Muslim prayers, an AFP correspondent reported.

But police fired live rounds as well as tear gas at the protesters as they neared the district's central Arood Square defying a ban on protests in the area.

One person was killed and 16 wounded, a medical source said. Activists said dozens more suffered from the effects of tear gas inhalation.

"The south is a state and an identity," the protesters chanted.

Police opened fire on a similar protest march on Khor Maksar late on Thursday, killing one demonstrator and wounding 12, medics said.

Video footage posted online showed police firing tear gas to disperse dozens of protesters as they held evening prayers out in the open.

Jubo League man hacked to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Miscreants hacked a Jubo League activist to death at Boidyar Bazar in the district's Sonargaon upazila yesterday.

The deceased, Tapan Chandra Barman, hailed from the upazila's Saatbhaitia Para.

Police detained a person named Mishu in connection with the killing, said Rezaul Haque, officer-in-charge of Sonargaon Police Station.

The killers left Tapan critically injured at Balur Math late in the evening. He was later taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared him dead, police said.

Shakib was absent from the match.

The incident occurred during the 33rd over of the innings, after Shakib had gotten out. He returned to the dressing room and, bare-chested with a towel wrapped around his torso, took a seat at the front of the viewing area. When the camera focused on him for a few seconds, he looked straight at the lens and gestured indecently at his private parts while a fellow cricketer sitting next to him, who was not playing in the match, reacted to the scene with laughter.

UN rights office criticises Australia asylum policy

AFP, Geneva

The UN's human rights office yesterday urged Australia to reconsider its policy of shipping asylum-seekers to Papua New Guinea and detaining them there, after rioting at a holding centre left one person dead.

Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the UN high commissioner for human rights, said this week's violence at the Manus Island facility had thrown the spotlight on a wider problem.

Manus Island and another centre in the tiny Pacific nation of Nauru are the core of Australia's punitive off-shore detention policy, which has been repeatedly condemned by the UN and human rights groups.

Under the scheme, which Australia says is aimed at deterring people-smugglers, any asylum-seeker arriving by boat or intercepted at sea is transferred to Manus or Nauru for processing and permanent resettlement outside Australia.

"We stress the obligation of Australia, PNG and Nauru to ensure that the human rights of asylum seekers are protected in accordance with international standards," Shamdasani told reporters.

"The practice of detaining migrants and asylum-seekers arriving by boat on a mandatory, prolonged and potentially indefinite basis, without individ-

ual assessment, is inherently arbitrary. Moreover, alternatives to immigration detention should always be considered," she added.

An estimated 1,340 asylum-seekers are currently being held at Manus Island.

Tensions with locals have reportedly spiked, and the detainees recently learned that if their asylum claims were approved they would only be allowed to settle in Papua New Guinea, not Australia.

Thirty-five asylum-seekers broke out of the facility on Sunday and several were injured.

In more rioting the following night, one person was killed and 77 injured, 13 of them seriously.

"While the precise circumstances are not yet clear, it is alarming to see violence against the very individuals who seek protection," said Shamdasani, adding that the incident underscored the need for independent monitoring of the facilities.

While welcoming a probe by Australian and Papuan New Guinean authorities, she said it must examine reports that private security forces were involved in the violence.

"We stress that states maintain their human rights obligations when they privatise delivery of services such as security, and must take steps to investigate, redress and punish human rights abuses by third parties," she said.

UN boss calls for linguistic

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The International Mother Language Day with the theme "Local Languages for Global Citizenship: Spotlight on Science".

"This will help ensure that the latest scientific knowledge is more widely shared. At the same time, it will help deepen and enrich our global knowledge base with more traditional but often overlooked scientific wisdom," said the message.

Unesco's General Conference in November 1999 proclaimed February 21 as International Mother Language Day.

On May 16, 2007, the UN General Assembly in its resolution called upon member states to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world'.

By the same resolution, the General Assembly proclaimed 2008 as the International Year of Languages to promote unity in diversity and international understanding through multilingualism and multiculturalism.

"As we work towards achieving the millennium development goals while mapping out a post-2015 sustainable development agenda, this diversity can encourage dialogue, mutual understanding, innovation and creativity," he said, adding that this in turn can help build more just and inclusive societies.

Quoting late president Nelson Mandela, the UN chief said, "If you

Zero tolerance on terrorism

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Bangladesh has also been successful in containing radicalisation through the promotion of tolerant and inclusive socio-cultural values and development, he added.

The Steering Group of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund aims to promote greater global engagement in countering extremism.

The foreign secretary is leading a four-member delegation on a five-day visit to the US.

Meanwhile, the United States has assured Bangladesh of full support in implementing Bangladesh's first-ever national strategy to address the issue of refugees and undocumented Myanmar nationals.

The assurance came at a meeting between Anne Richard, assistant secretary of the Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration, and the foreign secretary on Thursday.

The Bangladesh cabinet on September 9 last year approved the National Strategy Paper to identify, locate and ensure the return of three to five lakh undocumented Myanmar citizens (Rohingyas) to their home.

Appreciating Bangladesh's efforts on the Rohingya issue, the US official assured that her country would continue its constructive engagement with the Myanmar government to resolve the problem, said a foreign ministry press release.

Shahidul appreciated the US presi-

dent's insistence that the displacement of Myanmar Muslims should be resolved within Myanmar as it had its origin there.

Meeting Rose Gottemoeller, acting under secretary for Arms Control & International Security, Shahidul expressed satisfaction over the regular security and the defence dialogues between Bangladesh and the US.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation officials at a meeting with the foreign secretary congratulated Bangladesh for achieving eligibility for its assistance programme as per its annual scorecard.

The foreign secretary briefed the officials on Bangladesh's recent achievements in the economic and social sectors as well as in governance and anti-corruption measures.

At a meeting with Daniella Ballou-Aires, senior adviser to the secretary of state on development, Shahidul discussed the possible areas of bilateral and multilateral engagements with the US government on Post-2015 Development Agenda.

At another meeting, the foreign secretary briefed Nicholas Dean, senior director for South Asia of National Security Staff at the White House, on the recent developments in Bangladesh, particularly the workers' rights and workplace safety in the RMG sector.

The senior director appreciated Bangladesh's achievements in ensuring safety and workers' rights in the RMG sector within a very short time.

3-match ban

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two Asia Cup games against India on February 26 and Afghanistan on March 1.

Shakib's absence will definitely hurt the home side's campaign especially in the Asia Cup but still the board took the bold and appropriate decision to set an example that no one -- regardless of stature -- is above the law. It was the first such major action against a national cricketer since the match-fixing related ban on Mohammad Ashraful.

Shakib appeared at a disciplinary hearing yesterday where he admitted the offence and accepted responsibility for the act. After reviewing the matter the board has decided to impose the penalties on the cricketer as per the provisions under the BCB's code of conduct.

"Shakib was repentant for the incident and readily accepted that the behaviour was unbecoming of a player of his experience and stature. We also reminded him that his action was unacceptable," said BCB's acting CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury after the hearing.

The incident occurred during the 33rd over of the innings, after Shakib had gotten out. He returned to the dressing room and, bare-chested with a towel wrapped around his torso, took a seat at the front of the viewing area. When the camera focused on him for a few seconds, he looked straight at the lens and gestured indecently at his private parts while a fellow cricketer sitting next to him, who was not playing in the match, reacted to the scene with laughter.