

Millions Iraqis mark Ashura

KARBALA (AFP) — Millions of Shiites across Iraq on Sunday joined ceremonies marking the climax of solemn Ashura rituals.

Around three million people thronged the streets of the shrine city of Karbala in central Iraq for the main rituals commemorating the slaying of the revered Imam Hussein by the armies of a totalitarian ruler Yazid in 680, according to provincial deputy governor Nasaeef Jassim.

"Over the past 10 days, we have received around six million visitors who have come from all over Iraq, some coming by foot," Jassim said, adding that at least half of these had stayed for Sunday's climax of the annual event.

He added that among the pilgrims on Sunday were some 105,000 worshippers from foreign countries, mostly from the Persian Gulf but also including Pakistan, Canada and Tanzania.

Karbala police chief General Ali Jassim Mohammed had earlier in the week announced the deployment of around 25,000 policemen and soldiers to secure the commemoration ceremonies.

Violence elsewhere in the country, however, took the gloss off the largely peaceful Karbala pilgrimage.

Police said that early on Sunday a bomb ripped through a procession marking Ashura in the northern town of Tuz Khurmatu, near oil-rich Kirkuk, killing five people and wounding 27, including five women and a policeman.

The Tuz Khurmatu attack came a day after three Shiites were killed when bombs struck separate Ashura processions in Baghdad.

Since Tuesday, 32 people have been killed and more than 160 wounded in violence targeting Ashura, including attacks on worshippers in Karbala and Baghdad earlier in the week.

Karbala, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of Baghdad, was peaceful on Sunday.

"Despite a serious threat from armed groups to target visitors, the security plan has worked," said National Security Minister Shirwan al-Waili, who was visiting Karbala along with Interior Minister Jawad al-Bolani.

A peaceful Ashura is crucial for the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who has built his reputation on bringing security to Iraq, ahead of nationwide parliamentary elections on March 7.

Ceremonies began with thousands of devotees drenched in blood after ritually slicing their scalps and were to end with a re-enactment of the battle for Karbala in 680 in which Imam Hussein was killed.

South Korea wins \$40 billion UAE nuclear deal



South Korean companies Sunday won one of the world's largest nuclear power plant deals, estimated to be worth \$40 billion, in the United Arab Emirates.

(Contd. from p. 1)

According to Reuters the figures are in line with what industry sources told the news agency earlier on Sunday.

The first reactor will be completed in 2017 to produce power and the others will be completed by 2020, the Korean presidential office and official resident Blue House said in a statement.

The Korean consortium includes Korea Electric Power Corp. (KEPCO), Hyundai Engineering and Construction, Samsung C&T Corp., Doosan Heavy Industries as well as Westinghouse Electric Co., of the U.S. and Toshiba Corp. of Japan.

The KEPCO lead group beat a French team led by industry leader Areva SA, a General Electric-Hitachi alliance, GdF Suez SA, Electricite de France S.A. and Total SA. The announcement marks the end of a year-long, high-stakes commercial and diplomatic endeavor.

The UAE has said it will import all fuel for its nuclear reactors and will not enrich uranium or reprocess used nuclear fuel, allaying Western concerns about uranium enrichment facilities being used for making weapons-grade material.

The UAE's program could trigger a race among Persian Gulf Arab states for atomic energy resources to meeting surging electricity demand.

According to analysts nuclear power could put the UAE in a position to export electricity via the Persian Gulf Arab power grid in the future. Currently only Qatar has excess electricity

generation capacity for export but its economy and power capacity is relatively small in comparison to other Persian Gulf countries.

The UAE, the world's third largest oil exporter, expects surging power demand from around 15,000 megawatts in 2008 to 40,000 MW in 2020 as oil wealth drives population and economic growth.

For South Korea, Asia's fourth largest economy, this deal paves the way to prove its nuclear power generation technologies on the global market.

The South Korean government aims to develop nuclear reactors with 100 percent proprietary technology by 2012 to achieve its export aims.

South Korea began its nuclear power generation in 1978, building its first plant based 100 percent upon U.S. technology. Since then, it has developed the technology to build about 95 percent of a standard nuclear power plant, industry experts have said.

Today South Korea has the world's sixth-largest atomic power generation capacity. The nation operates 20 nuclear reactors to provide 40 percent of its power needs and plans to build eight more plants.

Korea's major export items to the UAE include automobiles, mobile phones and electronic appliances. Korean firms are active in infrastructure construction in the Emirates. The UAE's major shipments include crude petroleum, naphtha and LPG.

Low turnout in Croatian presidential election

ZAGREB (DPA) — Voter turnout appeared to be low Sunday in Croatia, where polling stations were open for the country's presidential election. A dozen candidates are in the running to become president, and thus the figure likely to lead the former Yugoslav republic into the European Union.

Only 10.7 percent of the 4.5 million registered voters had cast their ballots by 11 am (10 GMT), four hours into the 12-hour vote, the election commission said.

The turnout time was by 5 percent weaker than in the previous poll, when the incumbent Stjepan Mesic won his second five-year term. Then 50.5 percent of the electorate showed up to vote.

Croatia is currently engaged in accession negotiations with Brussels, with membership likely to follow by 2011.

The opposition Social Democratic Party's (SPD) candidate, Ivo Josipovic, was the clear frontrunner in final pre-election opinion polls.

However, he is not expected to win more than 50 percent of the votes needed for an outright election victory, and so would have to face the next best-placed rival in a run-off vote on January 10.

Fighting for the place in the run-off are Zagreb mayor and SPD defector Milan Bandic, independent candidate Nadan Vidosevic and the ruling conservative Croatian Democratic Union's (HDZ) Andrija Hebrang.

There are some 4.5 million registered voters in Croatia, including some 400,000 who live abroad, mostly in Bosnia.

Because of the law allowing dual citizenship to ethnic Croats, 300,000 of whom are also Bosnian citizens, the country has as many registered voters as it has inhabitants.

The law helps the conservative HDZ, as most of the voters from the diaspora vote to the right of the political centre.

Vatican court to judge Pope assailant within weeks

ROME (AFP) — A Vatican court will judge the woman who launched a Christmas Eve assault on Pope Benedict XVI "within a few weeks", its president said on Sunday.

The 25-year-old woman identified as Susanna Maiolo leapt over a security barrier and knocked the pope to the ground at midnight mass in Saint Peter's Basilica.

She was taken for psychiatric treatment after the incident, and in an interview with Italian bishops' newspaper *Avvenire*, Vatican court president Giuseppe Dalla Torre said her mental state would be an important issue.

The pope came through the assault apparently unscathed and was able to celebrate the mass as planned.

French Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, injured in the incident, meanwhile underwent successful surgery Sunday to repair his right hip and was in good condition in hospital, the Vatican said in a statement.

Etchegaray, 87, who was close to the pope in the procession, had apparently lost his balance in the incident and fell, breaking the hip bone.

Maiolo, who has Swiss and Italian nationality, tried to reach the pope in almost identical circumstances last year, but was stopped by security staff.

The Main Task of Kazakhstan as OSCE's Chairman – Minimization of the risks



Some conflict areas still remain within the OSCE territory threatening to become the centers of local tension.

Problems related to energy security, uneven social and economic and confessional conflicts can not be solved overnight. That is we believe that the OSCE activities, including predicting, preventing and mediating conflicts as well as post-conflict rehabilitation, are very important. The OSCE retains the position of the largest Eurasian political organization, consisting of 56 nations in Europe, North America, Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

In 2010 the OSCE will celebrate its 35th Anniversary. Kazakhstan is the first member among all the former Soviet nation that will by that time be the chair of the organization. Our nation sees the cooperation with OSCE as one of its most important foreign policy priorities. Kazakhstan supports constructive dialogue with various OSCE's bodies concerning the main activities, including:

- 1) political and security issues;
- 2) economic issues, scientific and technical cooperation, environmental observation;
- 3) humanitarian issues human rights protection.

We pay special attention to the cooperation with OSCE in terms of Asian security focusing on the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific regions. With its chairmanship Kazakhstan stands to enforce the OSCE as an important platform

where multilateral dialogue and partnership can evolve.

This becomes very important given the simmering disputes about the crisis faced by the organization, its outlook and the necessity to develop a new understanding of the nature of its activity. Our nation considers Kazakhstan's chairmanship in the OSCE as an opportunity to foster economic reforms and further political modernization. Preparation for Kazakhstan chairmanship in the OSCE took place during the financial crisis which could trigger some "frozen conflicts" and bring about other ones.

Another threat comes from demagogues, opportunists and pseudo-patriots who tend to become more active during crisis. Far left and far right radicals, chauvinists and all types of nationalists are extremely dangerous. Political opportunists can take over the reins of power in destabilized countries, in particular during a financial crisis. It would enough to recall crisis of the last century: the 1920s with Benito Mussolini in Italy, and the 1930s with Adolf Hitler in Germany.

During the crisis, a growing number of people turn to God. Islam, Christianity and Judaism – the three major religions, which are followed by the majority of the world's population – stand against violence, bring peace and harmony to the world and reject every form of violence and cruelty.

Terrorist who commit crimes hiding behind the symbols of Islam, Christianity or Judaism, have nothing to do with religion. A true believer of any religions can not commit the most serious sin of killing an innocent.

heikh Absattar Derbisali, chairman of Kazakhstan's administration of the Muslims

and the Council of Muftis of Central Asia said: "The ideas of humanism, tolerance, compassion and hope for a better future lift us above the passing worries and every day fuss and make us to think about the meaning of our life [1]."

It is through the religion that people hope to revive traditional values and moral statutes.

The interreligious concord in Kazakhstan primarily based on Islam and Orthodoxy. The holidays and Kurban Ait and Christmas now have the status of non-working days for the third consecutive year in Kazakhstan.

Nevertheless, life goes on. The complexity and ambiguity of religious aspects require that the central and regional government bodies pay close attention to the issue and make additional efforts in maintaining mutual concord and understanding under the new circumstances.

Kazakhstan is currently developing its own model for the relationships between government and religious organizations based on the principles of partnership, mutual respect and non-interference in the other's internal affairs.

Kazakhstan's experience in attaining and enhancing enterethnic, interreligious and social concord is unique; it provides a powerful example of how to effectively resolve social and political problems without use of force.

This model is based on the confidence that we have a lot to gain from ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity, under the consolidating role of Kazakh ethnic group.

It would seem that President N. Nazarbayev was perfectly right in saying that the ideas of superiority of one ethnic group compared to another impede world development and have been proved to be misanthropic and destructive, even within a mono-ethnic group. It is necessary to learn and teach how to listen to and understand other ethnic groups and how to respect their language, religion and traditions. We can not achieve success in the modern world without this understanding.

The Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies

Yemen says Houthi rebel leader may be dead

DUBAI (Dispatches) — The leader of Yemen's Shi'ite rebels may have died after being severely wounded by government forces in the north of the country, a Yemeni government website and media said on Sunday.

The rebels could not immediately be reached and their website did not comment on the reports.

Government troops in Yemen, the poorest Arab state, have been battling Shi'ite rebels, known as Houthis after the family name of their leader Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, who complain of social, religious and economic discrimination.

The Yemeni defense ministry said on its website that Houthi was wounded in an attack by government forces and might have died from his wounds.

Saudi-owned Al Arabiya television also said the rebel leader was dead, citing unnamed Yemeni sources as saying he was killed in an airstrike. Yemeni news websites carried the same report.

There have been rumors about Abdul-Malik's death in the past but the latest reports appear to be stronger.

The conflict drew in neighboring Saudi Arabia, the top OPEC oil exporter, after the Houthis seized Saudi territory last month, prompting Riyadh to launch a military campaign against them.

The United States and Saudi Arabia fear al Qaeda will exploit instability in Yemen, which also faces a separatist movement in the south, to stage attacks on neighbouring states and beyond.

On Thursday the Yemeni government carried out air strikes on suspected gathering of Al Qaeda operatives, supported by U.S. intelligence, killing 30 people reported the LA Times.