

NEWS IN BRIEF



Viva Palestina arrives in Egypt to enter Gaza



CAIRO (Dispatches) — Viva Palestina humanitarian aid convoy has arrived in the Egyptian port city of El-Arish to pass through the Rafah border crossing into the Gaza Strip.

A Turkish ship, which carries the convoy from the Syrian port of Lattakia to Egypt, arrived in El-Arish on Sunday evening, said Gamal Abdel Maqsood, head of El-Arish port.

The ship carrying the 250-vehicle convoy will be unloaded at the port and be transferred to the Gaza Strip via Rafah crossing, according to Egypt's official MENA news agency.

According to the report, 528 activists from 17 countries who are onboard the convoy will also travel to Gaza.

But The Viva Palestina convoy's first batch flew to this port city on Tuesday, only to find their passports seized by the Egyptian authorities for seven hours.

The Egyptian Immigration Department stamped the passports of the 157 members of the convoy with 'entry' and 'exit' simultaneously.

While they were instructed to pay US\$15 per person for their visa upon arrival, exemption was however, given to Malaysian and Turkish citizens aged above 45.

War crimes fears force Israelis to cancel UK trip



JERUSALEM (AP) — A group of Israeli military officers called off an official visit to Britain next week, fearing they could face arrest on war crimes charges, officials said Tuesday.

The four unidentified officers, holding ranks from major to colonel, are the latest in a string of Israeli politicians and military officials forced to call off travel to Britain over fears of legal prosecution relating to last year's offensive on the Gaza Strip.

Britain is one of the European pioneers of universal jurisdiction, a broad legal concept that empowers judges to issue arrest warrants for nearly any visitor accused of committing war crimes anywhere in the world.

Pro-Palestinian activists have sought to use this concept to press charges against Israelis involved in military operations in Palestinian territories, particularly since last year's Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip. British officials have vowed to change the law.

The announcement of the cancellation came as Britain's attorney general, Patricia Janet Scotland, was in Israel on a private visit.

UN curbs Somali food aid



Jan. 5 (Bloomberg) — The United Nations World Food Programme curbed food aid to a million people in southern Somalia after Islamist rebels said the aid agency couldn't employ women and had to pay it for security.

The al-Shabaab militia controls much of the southern and central parts of the country and has been fighting Somalia's Western-backed government for the past two years along with other groups, including Hisbul-ul-Islam.

In November, the al-Shabaab group set unreasonable conditions, saying we couldn't employ women and that the WFP should pay al-Shabaab \$20,000 every six months for security, Peter Smerdon, a spokesman for the WFP, said in an interview from Nairobi, Kenya, Tuesday. They also demanded that we do not deliver food to areas under their control and, as they control 95 percent of the area, this was unacceptable to us.

Turkey rounds up 20 Kurds for links to rebels



ANKARA (AFP) — Turkish police Tuesday detained 20 people in simultaneous operations across four provinces targeting an urban group accused of collaborating with armed Kurdish rebels.

Anti-terror police rounded up the suspects in dawn raids on 22 locations in the southern provinces of Mersin, Gaziantep and Hatay and the eastern province of Adiyaman, the report said. They were all brought to Gaziantep city for questioning, it said.

About 30 people, among them Kurdish mayors, were detained in similar raids last month.

The operations target an underground Kurdish group which is known as the urban arm of the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and is accused of organising pro-PKK protests and street violence in the southeast.

The PKK, listed as a terrorist group by Turkey and much of the international community, took up arms against Ankara in 1984, sparking a conflict that has claimed about 45,000 lives.



Members of Yemen's Counterterrorism Unit trained near Sana last year under the watch of an American Special Forces instructor.

(Photo Karim Ben Khelifa)

Yemen forces on high alert, U.S. embassy reopens

By staff and agencies

SAN'A, Yemen — The U.S. Embassy in Yemen reopened Tuesday after a two-day closure, saying successful Yemeni counterterrorism operations have addressed the threat that prompted the measure.

The embassy shut down on Sunday because of an imminent al Qaeda attack. In an announcement on its Web site Tuesday, the embassy said the Yemeni operations have allowed it to resume operations, reports The Wall Street Journal.

The reopening came a day after government forces killed two alleged al Qaeda militants in a raid on a tribal village, part of a stepped-up offensive after the group's regional chapter claimed responsibility for the attempted bombing of a Detroit-bound jet on Christmas Day.

The capital, San'a, remained on high alert as worry mounted over threatened al Qaeda attacks and Yemeni government reprisals against the group.

Over the weekend, a Yemeni official said the government had sent military forces to areas thought to harbor al Qaeda militants. Monday's raid, on the

restive tribal village of Arhab, 20 miles northeast of San'a, targeted a senior, wanted al Qaeda leader, Mohammed Ahmed al-Hanq, the government said in a statement. Yemeni forces killed two of his followers and wounded two others, but Mr. Hanq escaped, the statement said.

Arhab was also the target of a Dec. 17 military strike by Yemeni forces that the government said killed four suspected al Qaeda followers, whom government officials said were planning suicide operations against foreign targets in Yemen. Two other airstrikes that same week, elsewhere in Yemen, killed dozens of people.

The strikes fanned popular anger against the government and the U.S., which provided intelligence for at least one of the attacks, according to U.S. officials.

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles Times reported Tuesday that the Interior Ministry said it had arrested five other "terror elements" in and around the capital and Hudaydah province. The ministry said that it had beefed up security measures in and around the foreign embassy and residen-

tial districts favored by international community.

An article carried by The New York Times quotes Yemeni officials and Western diplomats saying that the Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh has filled his government with members of his family and wants to ensure that his son Ahmed succeeds him. Ahmed Saleh is head of the Yemen Republican Guard and the country's special forces.

"Saleh presents the Obama administration with problem that is all too familiar in Afghanistan and Pakistan," writes the Times adding that while he is amenable to the U.S. support "but his ineffective and corrupt bureaucracy has limited reach."

Much of Yemen remains in turmoil. There is the Houthi rebellion in the north, a growing secessionist movement in the south and a threat by al-Qaeda in the central part of the country.

In important provinces where key oil resources are and where al-Qaeda is strong, the government troops and the police largely remain in their barracks or in the central cities. Order outside the cities is kept by tribal chiefs, with their own complicated loyalties.

Another war: this time in Africa?

(Contd. from p. 1)

Anti-terror measures

The U.S. embassy in Yemen reopened Tuesday following announcement that Yemeni security forces killed al-Qaeda suspected of formulating attacks on U.S. and UK embassies. Now there are fears of a backlash as the Yemeni government is seen to be cooperating too openly with the U.S.

In the past seven months the U.S. and UK governments have extended financial and military aid in training Yemeni police force on anti-terror tactics and equipment.

Meanwhile the UK, French, German, Czech and Japanese embassies remain closed.

The Obama administration officials announced Sunday that citizens from 14 nations will be subject to indefinite intensive screening at the American airports. These countries include:



Cuba, Iran, Sudan, Syria, Afghanistan, Algeria, Lebanon, Libya, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Yemen. Nigeria declared U.S. security measures unfair.

There is an ongoing controversy over body scanners, which opponents say reveal contours of the body, invading privacy. While the proponents say it's a trade-off between security and privacy, opponents claim that it is tantamount to strip search.

According to a BBC report the nationals from the above-mentioned 14 countries can be subject to extra-precautionary measures while on flight: Cannot see the flight map; no blanket; and suspected passengers should remain seated one hour before landing.

With all these security measures, the question remains whether a U.S. military intervention will be deemed necessary or not. Hopefully Obama will not make the mistakes his predecessor did.



U.S. arms sale to Taiwan fumes Beijing

BEIJING — China has raised solemn representations to the United States government and urged it to cancel and cease arms sales to Taiwan, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said Tuesday.

Jiang made the remarks at a regular news briefing in response to a question on China-US relations in 2010. The Obama administration is reportedly expected to approve the sale of arms to Taiwan early this year and President Barack Obama is also preparing to meet the Dalai Lama.

Taiwan and Tibet-related issues were China's core interests as they related to China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Jiang said. China firmly opposed arms sales to Taiwan by the US and urged the US to cancel planned arms sales to avoid undermining China-US cooperation, Jiang said.

"We urge the US to clearly recognize the severe consequences of arms sales to Taiwan and adhere to the three Sino-US joint communique, especially the principles established in the Joint Communique on August 17, 1982," Jiang said.

China stood firmly against any foreign leader's contact with the Dalai Lama in any form and in any name, Jiang said.

She also said both sides should more resolutely oppose trade protectionism to maintain healthy development of China-US economic and trade relations.



Australia is duty-bound to take action: Krishna

BANGALORE — External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna on Monday said the Australian government was "duty-bound" to investigate the fatal stabbing of Indian youth Nitin Garg in Melbourne, and bring the culprits to book.

Such unfortunate incidents would only vitiate the atmosphere of trust, belief and cordiality in the relationship between the two countries, told journalists here.

The Minister said he was in constant touch with the Australian High Commission and the Indian High Commissioner in Australia and getting all updates on Sunday's incident.

Asked whether it was a racist attack or motivated by something else, he said: "The fact is that an Indian student has been murdered and the Australian government is duty bound and morally bound to go for investigations and then bring the culprit to book. That is the least the Australian government can do and that is what we expect."

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had said the government of Australia and those of the provinces would take the most stringent action according to the law of the land. "I hope even in this case the police authorities will accelerate the process of investigation and bring the culprits to justice," Mr. Krishna said.



At least 7 die in China coal mine fire; 20 trapped

BEIJING (AP) — A fire in a coal mine in central China killed at least seven people Tuesday, and search efforts continued into the night for 20 others trapped underground, the state-run news agency reported.

The Xinhua News Agency said underground cables caught fire in the afternoon at the Lisheng coal mine in Xiangtan city in Hunan province.

The owner of the mine and a senior employee were detained, Xinhua said.

The seven bodies were found in a shaft about 160 meters (175 yards) underground, a local official told the news agency. Another 43 miners escaped the fire, which was later put out.

China's mining industry is the world's deadliest, with most accidents blamed on poor safety as enterprises scramble to feed the country's insatiable demand for coal. In November, 108 miners were killed in a coal mine blast in northeast China. It was the country's deadliest mining accident in two years.

China has been trying to close small mines or absorb them into larger state-owned ones. The Lisheng mine had just 180 workers, Xinhua said.

Pakistan highlights West's failure in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan's prime minister said Tuesday that his country has been more successful at battling a Taliban-led insurgency than Western forces in Afghanistan, a bold criticism at a time when the U.S. is pushing Islamabad for more help.

The comments could be particularly aggravating to the Obama administration, which is frustrated that Pakistan has not done more to target Taliban militants launching cross-border attacks on U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan. Such help is deemed critical to the Western coalition's success.

"The success of our efforts stands out in sharp contrast to what the coalition forces in neighboring Afghanistan have been able to achieve over the past nine years," said Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani while presiding over a meeting of senior military personnel and politicians who deal with defense issues.

Britain blasted by winter chill

MANCHESTER (AFP) — Freezing temperatures and heavy snow gripped northern England and Scotland Tuesday, stopping transport links and major football fixtures and closing three airports and hundreds of schools.

Britain brought in extra gas supplies from continental Europe to meet a 30 percent rise on normal seasonal use, the BBC reported.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown said: "There are always difficulties when we have a long spell of bad weather."

In northwest England, heavy snow blocked roads and triggered accidents while Manchester and Liverpool airports reopened after closing. One truck driver was killed in a motorway collision in Manchester.

The snow wiped out both League Cup semi-final first legs, with Wednesday's Manchester derby between City and United and Blackburn's match against visitors Aston Villa postponed.