

World news briefs

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Afghanistan:

Peter Jouvenal, A British hotelier and cameraman is being accused by Afghan officials of being part of the kidnapping of the three UN workers. He said that he had carried a note containing a ransom offer of \$1.2 million from a Kosovo businessman to the Army of Muslims group, but believes that no ransom was paid. Jouvenal continues to proclaim that he has had no part in the kidnapping and professes innocence. He has helped negotiate ransoms in past kidnappings and this was the first time that Afghan officials have given him any problems.

The three UN election workers were released by the Army of Muslims group last week after a month in captivity. They are now leaving Afghanistan. Representatives of the militant group claim that the workers were released in exchange for a release of Taliban members held by the government; however, government officials claim that no such agreement was made.

Two U.S. soldiers were killed by an improvised explosive device in central Afghanistan when their vehicle was blown up as it crossed a dry river bed. One other soldier was wounded and has been evacuated to a medical facility.

Pakistan:

The 22 November edition of Newsweek has been banned in Pakistan. It contains an article about the Dutch filmmaker, Theo Van Gogh, 47, who was murdered on November 2nd. His controversial film critical of Islamic culture was intended to illustrate domestic violence in Muslim societies. One of the more controversial aspects of the film was featured

in the magazine-- images of Koranic verses inscribed on semi-naked women. Magistrate Tariq Mahmood Pirzada said the article, Clash of Civilisations, "contained some objectionable remarks which are tantamount to desecration of the Koran.

In an attempt to get more support from tribesmen in the North-West Frontier province, government officials have given amnesty to five key tribesmen after they pledged not to support al-Qaeda. Additionally, tribal check points will be removed from the border areas of the region. Hundreds of al-Qaeda militants are reportedly hiding in the North-West region which includes the North and South Waziristan and borders Afghanistan.

Israel:

On Sunday, PLO chief Mahmoud Abbas told the Arab League, during a visit to Egypt, that the Palestinians will not accept an interim settlement with Israel. He also said the establishment of a Palestinian state in 2005, as called for in the Mideast Quartet's road map to peace, was possible. The militant al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades - the armed wing of the Fatah movement - has announced that it will back his candidacy for the January poll. Mr Abbas is a moderate and there have been questions as to whether he might be opposed by Fatah's militants but they seem to have been persuaded by jailed Fatah leader, Marwan Barghouti. Barghouti announced on Friday he would not run in the Palestinian presidential election, and urged supporters to back Mr Abbas.

The Palestinian Authority has said it is disbanding a small security unit in Gaza accused of human rights abuses. A senior official said the 70 members of the Department of Protection and Security, known as the "Death Squad", would

be re-assigned to other units. The unit was formed more than a year ago in response to attacks by opposition factions against the Palestinian Authority.

Riots erupted in the Sharon prison on Sunday when prisoner Amana Muna, who murdered 16-year old Israeli youth Ophir Rahum in January 2001, refused to stand for an inspection. The security detainees poured boiling oil and chemical products on the facility's guards.

Zimbabwe:

The government has tightened its reporting laws this month by creating the "Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act." This law makes it illegal for any foreign journalist to be based in Zimbabwe and punishes any journalist who reports without the approval of a government appointed commission. Many current journalists feel this is President Mugabe's attempt to take Zimbabwe off of news headlines and out of the world's view.

Sudan:

Restrictions on humanitarian aid were issued last week in Sudan's region of northern Darfur when fighting escalated between the Janjaweed and rebel forces. Because of the fighting, aid workers had to be airlifted from the region by the United Nations, resulting in over 300,000 internally displaced people without any aid. The governor of North Darfur has claimed the region is in a state of emergency and encouraged all foreign aid groups to resume their work. Many aid groups are hesitant to return, especially the UN World Food Bank Program, which is stating that it will not resume operations.

Iran:

The IAEA has cleared twenty centrifuges, and passed a resolution welcoming the

suspension of uranium enrichment, but in the resolution, there was no mention of reproductions if Iran resumes enrichment production. The US however has stated that it will continue to monitor the nuclear production in Iran and if enrichment resumes it will consider reporting Iran to the UN. It has been reported that IAEA officials will not remain to keep guard over the centrifuges, but rather cameras will monitor all uranium production.

Iraq:

Despite current battle conditions, the government still intends to hold elections on January 30, 2005. A spokesman for interim Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi said: "The government is determined to hold elections at the scheduled date and is working with the various political forces to that purpose." The temporary constitution calls for the elections to take place at the end of January, pend-

ing candidates file during the end of November and the beginning of December. The electoral commission has set December 10th as the candidate filing deadline. The election will have representatives from multiple parties due to the heavily split country. The process is definitely one to follow.

European Union:

On Monday afternoon, November 29th, the body of a 40-year-old man was found in Glen Eagles Gardens in Belfast. The police are conducting an investigation, but so far there are no leads. The father of Emily Webster is suing First Great Western for not putting seatbelts in high-speed trains. The Devon girl was killed in the Berkshire rail crash and the father says a seatbelt would have saved her life. First Great Western is still considering the seatbelt issue

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