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Afghanistan

US military notifies detainees at Guantanamo Bay their right to go to court
The Washington Post (WP) is reporting that the US authorities in Gunatanamo Bay, Cuba have begun notifying some 550 terror suspects at its detention facility that they had the right to challenge their detention in US courts. According to WP, a three-paragraph letter given to each detainee explains the reason of their detention and informs them that they had the right to contest their detention in a US court. Major Michael Shavers, a US military spokesman, told WP that detainees had been earlier informally informed of their right and that the letter was simply a further clarification to the information that was given to the detainees in July this year, following the US Supreme Court ruling that they had the right to challenge their detention. Lawyers representing some of the detainees have called the military’s notice extremely late in coming, unclear, and practically useless to detainees who do not have access to lawyers. Commenting on the letter Gitanjali Gutierrez, an attorney for a group of African detainees, said if the detainees were to follow the instructions in the letter, “they’re almost assured of being denied their rights.” The US continues to hold some 550 detainees (from over 42 countries) captured during its military operation in Afghanistan, following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US. Many human rights groups and some governments have been very critical of the US for the indefinite detention of terror suspects and placing the detainees in legal limbo without charges and a right to legal representation. They accused the US of violating international treaties. The US has denied the charges, saying that these detainees were “enemy combatants” and were not subject to the provisions of the Geneva Conventions and their treatment as prisoners of war. The US government was dealt a blow this summer when a US court ruled on June 28 that detainees had right to challenge their detention in US federal courts.


UN says some 60 percent of Afghan militia disarmed
The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is saying that some 29,000 individuals representing some 60 percent of the armed militia in the country have been disarmed under a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) campaign led by Afghanistan’s New Beginnings Program (ANBP), in conjunction with the Afghan defense ministry. Ariane Quentier, a spokesperson for UNAMA, told a press briefing in the Afghan capital Kabul today that of the 29,000 militia fighters who have been disarmed, some 25,500 have
already entered ANBP’s reintegration program to acquire jobs, skills training and/or support for establishing small businesses to integrate themselves into civil society. She said some 6,700 fighters from the 7th and 8th Corps loyal to northern strongman Abdul Rashid Dostum and that of his rival Atta Mohammed, in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, have been disarmed and decommissioned. She said the Afghan Ministry of Defense has decommissioned 115 of an estimated 190 militia units in the country since the nationwide DDR campaign began last October (2003). According to ANBP, disarmament teams have collected some 7,360 working or repairable heavy weapons representing the bulk of the heavy weapons in the country with the exception of Panjshir valley, where talks were still underway to collect weapons. In October, ANBP, in cooperation with Afghanistan’s Ministry of Defense, announced a Financial Redundancy Package (FRP) for commanders and senior officers of militia units in exchange for their disarmament and demobilization. Under the scheme, commanders and officers of the Afghan militia units would receive monthly payments of US$350-550 for a period of two years. UN officials at ANBP said that they were optimistic the incentives would help boost the DDR process. Japan, which is the main backer of the DDR program, has provided US$2.5 million for the FRP initiative in addition to the US$59.5 million it already committed for the campaign. ANBP has eight regional offices in Kunduz, Gardez, Kabul/Parwan, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar, Bamiyan, Jalalabad and Herat.

http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=336252

India

Blast injures 4 in India’s southern Andhra Pradesh state as ceasefire with leftist rebels expires; Leftist violence serious concern in 53 districts

The Chief Minister of southern Andhra Pradesh state, Y. S. Rajashekar Reddy, today urged restraint from security forces and leftist rebels in the state, shortly before a ceasefire with the influential leftist rebel group, the People’s War Group (PWG), was to expire tomorrow (December 16). The comments also came
after four policemen were reportedly injured in a landmine blast, suspected to be planted by rebels, yesterday in the state. The state government so far has not commented on extending the six-month ceasefire, which was made in June this year, along with a lifting of a ban on the group, to pave the way for direct, landmark talks with the rebels in October. Although both sides successfully discussed land reform issues, further talks have stalled over the refusal of the rebels to give up armed struggle. The PWG had merged with another leftist rebel group, the Maoist Communist Center (MCC), as well other smaller leftist groups, to form the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-M), shortly before the talks in October. CPI-M leaders yesterday reportedly accused the government of violating the ceasefire agreement and reportedly called for rebels to repel police attacks. The PWG says that it is fighting for the landless poor classes. At least 6,000 people are believed to have been killed in PWG’s 23-year-old insurgency. In 2003 alone, at least 101 political members from both ruling and opposition parties were reportedly killed in leftist violence in the state. According to a recent federal Home Ministry assessment, Maoist or leftist violence is of serious concern in 12 of India’s largest states. The PWG is believed to be active in a “Compact Revolutionary Zone” that extends from the Nepal border to southern Tamil Nadu. Fifty-three districts in India have been identified as “highly-affected” by leftist rebels, while 17 are “moderately affected, 52 are “less affected” and 21 have possible leftist activities.

http://www.thestatesmen.net/page.news.php?clid=2&theme=&usrsess=1&id=63054
http://www.thestatesmen.net/page.news.php?clid=2&theme=&usrsess=1&id=63053
Grenade attacks continue in India’s northeastern Assam state, killing 1 and injuring 5 others
Suspected rebels today threw a grenade into a crowded market in the main city of Guwahati in northeastern Assam state, killing 1 and injuring 5 others, in the latest in a series of bomb attacks in the state. At least 4 people have been killed in at least 11 separate bomb attacks across the state since Monday (December 13). Reports say between 50 to 80 people have been injured in the attacks, which occurred in places such as marketplaces, near government buildings and a railway station. The police suspect the rebel United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) for the attacks, and security has been increased across the state. In an alleged letter from the ULFA today, the group denied responsibility for some of the blasts. The attacks reportedly occur one year after Bhutan began a massive crackdown to evict Indian rebel camps on its territory, including those of the ULFA. Police say there have been intelligence reports that ULFA commanders were instructed to launch revenge strikes to mark the first anniversary of the Bhutan operation in a show of strength. In October this year, at least 65 people were killed and 200 others injured in a wave of rebel bombings in Assam and neighboring Nagaland state. The attacks were blamed on the ULFA and another Assam-based rebel group, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). Both groups claimed responsibility for some attacks. Shortly after, the Assam government offered a ceasefire to both groups. The NDFB responded with a ceasefire, while the ULFA rejected them. The ULFA also rejected a peace talks offer from New Delhi last week. Both groups are fighting for autonomy for the Assamese and Bodo ethnic groups in the northeast. Nearly 10,000 people have died in fighting between security forces and both groups in the past 15 years.

http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=336234
http://asia.news.yahoo.com/041216/ap/d87ooshg2.html
Indonesia

Indonesian security forces put on high alert following warnings by foreign countries

Indonesian security forces were reportedly on high alert following warnings of a possible terrorist attack from its neighbor, Australia, which was followed by warnings from Britain, New Zealand, and Japan. The US Embassy, in an email to expatriates, also followed suit, and reportedly “reminded” its citizens “that the terrorist threat in Indonesia continues and may increase over the holiday period.”

Indonesian police say an operation had been launched for the Christmas and New Year’s holiday season and they have deployed thousands of extra troops in hopes of preventing any possible attacks. Security officials in Jakarta also said they were preparing for more attacks by two fugitive Malaysians believed to be responsible for a series of bomb attacks in Indonesia. The two suspects, Azahari Husin, an alleged expert bomb maker, and so-called recruiting expert, Noordin Mohammad Top, are also alleged to be senior leaders of the al Qaeda-linked Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a Southeast Asian regional terror group. Yesterday, Australia issued a warning saying that it had received intelligence suggesting an attack in Indonesia, possibly at a Hilton hotel, but that other targets were a possibility. In 2000, in a series of attacks blamed on JI, Indonesia was hit by a series of bombs on some 38 churches and priests on Christmas Eve in which 19 people were killed. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono earlier this week ordered the deployment of extra security troops to guard churches across the country following sectarian violence in Central Sulawesi province over the weekend. The most recent terrorist attack was in Jakarta at the gates of the Australian Embassy in September, in which nine people were killed. Last year, suspected JI members bombed the J.W. Marriot Hotel in Jakarta, killing 12 people. In October 2002, bombings at nightclubs on Bali killed 202 people, including 88 Australians.

http://asia.news.yahoo.com/041216/afp/041216192730asiapacificnews.html

Nepal

At least 23 rebels reported killed in continuing major violence in western Nepal

More major violence was reported in Nepal today, following the deaths of at least 26 people in western Arghankachi district yesterday. Fighting erupted in mid-western Dailekh district and western
Lamjung district today, with at least 23 Maoist rebels killed in clashes with Nepali security troops, the army reports. Yesterday, 20 of the 26 dead were reportedly army troops. Seventeen rebels were killed in a clash in Naumule village in Dailekh district, located 375 miles (600km) west of the capital, Kathmandu, army spokesperson Colonel Naina Raj Dahal said. It is extremely difficult to independently confirm casualty figures in Nepal as both the rebels and government are suspected of exaggerating the toll of the other side and minimizing their own losses. Earlier, at least 6 rebels were killed by security forces in Lamjung district, located about 90 miles (150 km) west of Kathmandu. Security forces say they have foiled an overnight attack on a telephone exchange. Meanwhile, the government has sent reinforcements and helicopters to Arghakhanchi district, located some 220 miles (350 km) west of Kathmandu, the site of yesterday’s ambush of an army patrol. The attack was reportedly the worst for the army in the last six months. The violence follows a visit by a delegation from the European Union (EU) who urged Maoist rebels to return to peace talks with the government without preconditions, and to abandon violence and become a legitimate political group. The EU delegates said the Maoists should renounce violence preferably by a mid-January deadline set by Nepal’s prime minister. However, the rebels have already rejected the offer. The delegates also expressed concern to the Nepali government, saying that there can be no military solution to the conflict and expressed concern over the deteriorating human rights conditions in the country. Close to 10,000 people have died since the Maoists took up arms against the Nepali government in 1996 in the hopes of replacing the constitutional monarchy with a communist republic.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4100457.stm
**Sri Lanka**

**Monsoon-triggered floods spread to areas in Sri Lanka’s north**

More heavy rains drenched northern and eastern Sri Lanka today, following record flooding over the last couple of days that have killed at least 6 people and displaced upwards of 750,000 people. “Rain is subsiding in many parts of the east but the floodwaters have now spread to the north, inundating vast areas,” a spokesperson for the social services department said. Floodwaters reportedly spread to the northern districts of Jaffna, Mullaitivu, and Vavuniya. Officials say that some 12,500 families or 62,500 people were relocated to schools and temples on higher ground. Officials say they have opened sluice gates at several reservoirs out of fears that rising water levels could breach the embankments. The flooding was caused by severe annual monsoon flooding that swept across large swathes of the island nation. Floods are common across Sri Lanka during the northeast monsoon which lasts approximately from December to January. In Sri Lanka’s worst flooding in May 2003, some 254 people died and 700,000 were displaced from their homes.

http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/6686f45896f15db8852567ae00530132/25312dfe308ee21dc12566c004de9b5?OpenDocument
http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/COL156926.htm

**Thailand**

**UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) begins massive refugee registration in Thailand, following earlier registration in Malaysia**

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today, the UNHCR and the Thai government have begun a massive operation to re-register the entire population of 9 refugee camps in Thailand, that are sheltering an estimated 140,000 refugees from Myanmar. All 9 camps are located along the border with Myanmar and are run by the Thai government with NGOs providing assistance. Many refugees have been there for nearly a decade. The 47-member joint government and UNHCR registration team will be collecting bio-data, such as digital photographs and fingerprints as required by the Thai government, with
newly developed software. The project is expected to end in April 2004. The registration began on December 2 at the densely-populated Tham Him camp in Ratchaburi province, which hosts some 9,000 Karen ethnic refugees in 16 hectares (40 acres), who fled a government crackdown in Myanmar in 1997. The refugees’ registrations are checked every month, however, the new re-registration will “help the UNHCR provide protection for the refugees and also assist with requirements for any eventual durable solution”, as well as provide NGOs with better information to assist the refugees. The refugee camp population in Thailand was first registered in 1999, but only very little data was available at that time. Earlier this year, the UNHCR reached an agreement with Myanmar to provide for the eventual return of the refugees in Thailand, however, the UNHCR has continued to stress that the current security situation in Myanmar is not conducive for refugee return. In recent months, the Thai government has stepped up pressure on Myanmar refugees and asylum-seekers in the country, including the removal of urban asylum-seekers to border camps and alleged informal deportations. Meanwhile, last week the UNHCR in Malaysia began sending mobile registration teams to jungle refugee camps on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur in an effort to document hundreds of refugees ahead of an expected crackdown on illegal immigrants early next year. Among the 28,000 refugees, about 10,000 are Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar. In early November, Malaysia said it would grant temporary stay permits to the Rohingyas, but later conflicting government statements have raised concerns among the refugees. The UNHCR said it has relayed these concerns to the Malaysian government.

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Five killed in continuing violence in southern Thailand; Authorities arrest four suspected insurgents

At least 5 people have been killed in the latest violence in southern Thailand. Motorcycle assailants shot dead a Buddhist village chief yesterday in Narathiwat province after he dropped off his daughter. Assailants have often targeted civilians while they are with family members. In addition, an elderly former school headmaster was shot dead near Tak Bai town after attackers posed as customers in his store, while an ice cream vendor was shot dead in the same province. Two other villagers were reportedly killed in other nearby provinces, but details were not available. Separately, about 3,000 Buddhist teachers in Narathiwat began a two-day strike today to demand better security after a colleague was shot dead earlier this week. About 20 public school teachers have been killed since the beginning of the year, despite increased security. More than 550 people have been killed in southern Thailand since violence broke out in January this year. Most of those targeted have been security forces members, but insurgents have widened targets to include random civilian targets, including Muslim and Buddhist repair shop and restaurant owners and plantation workers, in what observers say is an attempt to increase sectarian tensions. Although most of Thailand’s Muslim minority live in the south, where Buddhists make up about 20 percent of the population, the region has a history of relative communal harmony. Meanwhile, officials have detained three teachers at private Islamic schools and a community leader, also a teacher, under a newly created
department in the Justice Ministry. They were charged with treason, which is punishable by death. A fifth suspect, the principal of a private Islamic school, has been charged in absentia. Wae-usoh Waedueramae, a member of the Islamic Committee of Pattani, an organization of community elders, is suspected by intelligence officials to be a high-level insurgent leader. There are both private and government-registered Islamic schools in the region. Meanwhile, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said today that security forces are hunting nearly 100 people suspected of key roles in the insurgency. He claimed that the recent progress was made possible by increased cooperation from the local population after efforts by the government and royal family to increase “moral support.” No groups have claimed responsibility for the attacks, and police have yet to detain a major separatist leader. Previous Muslim and communist insurgencies in the south were neutralized through government amnesty in the late 1980s.

http://asia.news.yahoo.com/041216/kyodo/d870mpmo0.html
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