

NEWS IN BRIEF

Haiti president heads to Washington to talk aid

PORT-AU-PRINCE: Haitian President Rene Preval is heading to the US to discuss what is needed to rebuild his shattered country. Preval says he plans to personally thank President Barack Obama on Wednesday for the private and public US aid that flooded into the country after the Jan. 12 earthquake that killed an estimated 230,000 people. The Haitian president told reporters before leaving Monday that he also hopes to discuss what next steps are needed for reconstruction. He says Haiti needs help with job creation and less donated food, which can undermine local producers. Preval's trip includes meetings with Secretary of State Clinton, Attorney General Eric Holder and the head of USAID. -AP

Guard shoots man at Ukrainian Consulate

ISTANBUL: A security officer guarding the Ukrainian Consulate in Istanbul on Tuesday shot and injured a man who claimed to be carrying a bomb, Istanbul Gov. Muammer Guler said. Guler said the man, a Turk, tried to enter the building because of a personal grievance concerning his wife in Ukraine and that it was not a terrorist attack. The man was hospitalized with injuries that were not life-threatening, Guler said. Bomb squads were called to examine a package the man was carrying, he said. "There is no political motive, it is not a terrorist event," Guler said. Police have launched an investigation, he said. NTV television said the man, aged 29, had been expelled from Ukraine. -AP

Amsterdam airport tightens security at duty free

AMSTERDAM: The Dutch anti-terror agency says security has been tightened at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport after investigative journalists smuggled bottles of liquid onto passenger jets bound for London and Washington, DC. Reporters refilled bottles bought at a duty free store, resealed them and smuggled them back into the store where they bought them. Staff then put the bottles in sealed bags that were not checked by security staff. The National Anti-terror Coordinator says extra security staff will patrol duty free stores at the airport and there will be more stringent checks on bottles bought there. Some stores will stop selling liquids altogether. Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab flew from Schiphol to Detroit on Christmas Day with explosives in his underwear. -AP

German minister critical of Vatican rule on abuse

BERLIN: Germany's justice minister said Monday that a Vatican secrecy rule has played a role in a "wall of silence" surrounding sexual abuse of children. The Vatican says it wouldn't comment on the criticism from Germany, the homeland of Pope Benedict XVI. Later Monday, Chancellor Angela Merkel praised the German church's effort to respond to a spate of abuse allegations. Justice Minister Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger cited a 2001 Vatican directive requiring even the most serious abuse cases to be first investigated internally. Scandals over sexual abuse by Catholic clergy of minors and cover-ups by church hierarchy have exploded worldwide in the last two decades, including in recent weeks in Germany and the Netherlands. Benedict has a meeting scheduled this week with the head of Germany's bishops conference. -AP

Haiti frees 9th US missionary, Baptist leader remains

PORT-AU-PRINCE: A US missionary held for more than a month in Haiti on kidnapping charges flew back to the United States after being released from prison, while the leader of her Baptist group remained in custody.

Charisa Coulter and Laura Silsby were the last two missionaries still in custody of 10 that were arrested for trying to take 33 children out of Haiti after the earthquake. The other eight were released Feb. 17.

Coulter, 24, was freed Monday and whisked from her jail cell to the airport by US Embassy staff.

Wearing a red tank top and sunglasses, she declined comment as she quickly got into an SUV that took her to the Haitian airport, where she caught a flight back to the United States.

Coulter's father said his daughter arrived in Miami late Monday and went straight to a hotel.

Mel Coulter said her release brought a mix of joy and sorrow, because the leader of the Idaho-based missionary group, Silsby, was left spending the night alone in a Haitian jail.

"It is good news, but it's tempered," Coulter said. "We're really happy to have our daughter back on American soil. But Laura is still there. So this is really only completing part of the journey for the two of them. My daughter has left her best friend behind."

He did not say when his daughter would head to her home in Boise, Idaho.



American missionary arrested on child kidnapping charges, Charisa Coulter, 24, of Meridian, Idaho, walks towards the courthouse in Port-au-Prince. (AP)

Silsby, 40, said she was glad about Coulter's release.

"I'm very happy that she left today, and for her freedom, and expect mine to come soon," Silsby told The Associated Press as she left the

courthouse where a judge held a closed hearing Monday. She was returned to her cell in a police station near Port-au-Prince airport.

Defense lawyer Louis Ricardo Chachoute said Coulter was released because there was no

evidence to support the charges of kidnapping and criminal association. He predicted Silsby would be released soon as well. "There are no prosecution witnesses to substantiate anything," Chachoute said.

Coulter is a diabetic and had medical difficulties during her confinement. She was treated at least once, on Feb. 1, by American doctors after collapsing from what she said was either severe dehydration or the flu.

After the hearing Monday for Silsby, Judge Bernard Saint-Vil said he heard evidence from a police officer who said he stopped Silsby from loading a bus with children near the Dominican Republic consulate in Port-au-Prince on Jan. 26. That was three days before her group was arrested while trying to cross into the Dominican Republic with 33 children.

"I found inconsistencies in some of Laura's statements," Saint-Vil told reporters, saying he planned to visit the Dominican consulate to resolve them.

The Americans' arrest came as Haitian authorities were trying to crack down on unauthorized adoptions to prevent child trafficking in the chaos following the catastrophic Jan. 12 earthquake.

Silsby initially said the children were orphaned in the quake that the government estimates has killed more than 230,000 people. But the AP found the children had been given away by still-living parents. -AP

Cyprus police confirm body is ex-leader's corpse

NICOSIA: A body discovered in a Nicosia cemetery is the stolen corpse of Cyprus' ex-president Tassos Papadopoulos, police said Tuesday.

DNA results obtained early Tuesday positively identified the corpse as Papadopoulos after a telephone tip-off led police to the body late Monday at the cemetery in the Nicosia suburb of Strovolos, police spokesman Michalis Katsounotos said.

Papadopoulos' corpse was dug up from another graveyard on Nicosia's southern outskirts in Dec. 11 - the eve of the first anniversary of his death from lung cancer.

Katsounotos wouldn't elaborate on the state of the corpse or possible motives

for the bizarre body snatching, but said more details would be revealed at a news conference later Tuesday.

The call to police was made from a phone booth a few miles (kilometers) away from the cemetery, Katsounotos. He said investigators examined the booth for fingerprints and other evidence that could lead to the caller's identity. Family members, including three of Papadopoulos' adult children, rushed to the cemetery amid heavy police security after being notified of the corpse's discovery.

The tip-off unlocked an investigation that has remained mostly dormant since grave robbers removed a heavy marble plaque from on top of his grave, digging

down to the coffin and removing the body of Papadopoulos, who died of lung cancer on Dec. 12, 2008, at age 74. The robbers left few leads at the scene. Lime was strewn over the grave in what investigators believe was an attempt to erase any tracks they might have left behind.

Investigators even sought the help of the FBI and Interpol as well as Greek and Israeli law enforcement authorities to solve the case.

The bizarre body-snatching shocked Cypriots and came as the divided island's Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders were locked in complex reunification talks. The talks have made only marginal progress after 18 months.

Cyprus was divided into an internationally recognized Greek Cypriot south and a breakaway Turkish Cypriot north in 1974 when Turkey invaded after a coup by supporters of union with Greece.

Papadopoulos, who was president from 2003 to 2008, was considered by many right wing Greek Cypriots to be a champion of resistance against peace accords that are weighted against them.

A lack of a firm motive and few clues led to widespread speculation that the theft was politically motivated. Authorities tried to dampen speculation, suggesting that ransom was a more likely scenario.

Papadopoulos ushered a divided Cyprus into the European Union in May 2004 after urging Greek Cypriots to reject a UN brokered reunification plan, which he vilified as entrenching the island's division rather than ending it. Three-quarters of Cypriots rejected it in a referendum; two-thirds of Turkish Cypriots accepted the plan. -Reuters



Fotini Papadopoulou, the widow of former Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos, speaks to the media in Nicosia March 9. (Reuters)

Ports Authority, Civil Aviation Syndicates set to strike over allowances

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He affirmed that the ports' employees will go ahead with their strike alongside the one to be staged by civil aviation employees. However, Al-Sukuni was quick to add that the ports' employees favor dialogue and urged Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs and Minister of Communications Dr Mohammed Al-Busairi to raise the matter with the Cabinet, particularly since there have been previous promises by the ministers to consider the demands.

"We have knocked on all doors and spoke to all ministers who have nodded to the allowances, in addition to MPs. We approached the officials of the Civil Service Council but we were not granted audience, so what can we do?" he lamentably asked.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Workers Syndicate threatened to stage a strike Tuesday if the allowances it has called for are not met. The syndicate's head, Ajmi Al-Mutalqem, argued that the allowances are a preserved right for all employees and that the World Bank "has nothing to do with it at all." He held both the Civil Service Commission and the Civil Service Council accountable for the current escalation. He said that the latter should take a "courageous decision by being fair to all without discrimination or moodiness." The syndicate defiantly asserted that the syndicate is ready to stage a strike as well as file a lawsuit against the Civil Service Council.

Legislative Committee approves Parliament sessions without Cabinet

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the lawmaker lamented. He described as unacceptable the treatment meted to Gulf nationals under the pretext of loyalty at "totally unacceptable."

The MP challenged the Minister of Interior and the Thamer Committee to "come out clean" over their stance over Kuwaiti citizens holding American or European passports. The legislator vowed to forward legislative questions in this respect and urged his colleagues to take action against this "act of discrimination." Meanwhile, the issue of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry remained alive at the National Assembly, with MP Hassan Johar putting forward a lengthy list of questions to Minister of Commerce and Industry Ahmad Al-Haroun about his assertion that the Chamber Law is one of the State's laws that were issued prior to the issuance of the Constitution and specifies that the number of board members is to be 14 when the Chamber had previously issued a booklet describing itself as a 24-member "public welfare institution."

In the same vein, the Legislative Committee approved a proposal tabled by MP Johar regarding the chamber, with a recommendation that Article 21 of the proposed bill be amended. The same committee endorsed another proposal forwarded by MP Faisal Al-Duwaisan to institute a Higher Council for Information in order to reinforce social values.

In another development, MP Askar Al-Enzi, the chairman of the Parliamentary Interior and Defense Committee announced that the committee has decided to invite the minister of interior to attend the committee's upcoming meeting slated for Sunday to discuss and investigate the fatal car race accident at the Doha Junction. The meeting will be reportedly attended by representatives of all concerned ministries. Al-Enzi, in the meantime, stated that the committee equally decided to raise the issue of hoax alarms in the presence of Ministry of Interior officials.

Calls for inquiry into Nigerian religious violence

JOS, Nigeria: The US government and an international human rights group called Tuesday for Nigeria to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the deaths of more than 200 unarmed people in renewed violence between Christians and Muslims. Human Rights Watch also asked Acting President Goodluck Jonathan to provide police and military protection for those in the small villages surrounding Jos, a central Nigerian city that has become the fault line for religious violence in the region. Those who survived attacks Sunday in three mostly Christian villages to Jos' south said security forces never provided them any guards, even though Jos itself has remained under a dusk-til-dawn curfew since violence in January left more than 300 dead, most of them Muslims.

"It's time to draw a line in the sand," Human Rights Watch researcher Corinne Dufka said in a statement Tuesday. "The authorities need to protect these communities, bring the perpetrators to book and address the root causes of violence."

Police say they've arrested more than 90 people suspected of inciting the violence. Survivors said the attackers spoke Hausa and Fulani, two languages used mostly by Muslims. Some described the violence as a reprisal attack for the Muslim deaths in January, while others said Fulani cattlemen wanted to take over their land on the dusty plateau.

The US Embassy in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, also issued a statement calling on Nigeria's federal government to seek justice "under the rule of law and in a trans-

parent manner," the embassy said.

The US also asked the state government to "ensure that all people and citizens in the Jos area feel that they are respected and protected."

Jonathan traveled to Jos after the violence in January, and promised that the fighting would stop. After the recent flare-up, the acting president fired his national security adviser late Monday night.

Jonathan also said security forces would lock down the borders of Plateau state to stop weapons and potential fighters from infiltrating the region. But on Monday, an Associated Press reporter passed through seven supposed checkpoints where searches should have been conducted and none were. Some posts were unmanned, while police and soldiers

at others merely watched a line of cars pass by without stopping them.

The killings Sunday add to the tally of thousands who have already perished in Africa's most populous country in the last decade due to religious and political frictions. Rioting in September 2001 killed more than 1,000 people. Muslim-Christian battles killed up to 700 people in 2004. More than 300 residents died during a similar uprising in 2008.

Nigeria is almost evenly split between Muslims in the north and the predominantly Christian south. The recent bloodshed has been happening in central Nigeria, in towns which lie along the country's religious fault line. It is Nigeria's "middle belt," where dozens of ethnic groups vie for control of fertile lands. -AP

Kuwaiti students connected to US visa fraud ring

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"Visa fraud is always a concern but their motive is definitely something that all of the participating agencies will be taking a very, very close look at over the next few weeks," Parker said. "It's pretty sophisticated and it's very impressive." Ten additional students were reportedly not arrested but will be questioned by agents in the ongoing investigation.

The agency plans to contact the campuses to make sure they are aware of the alleged fraud. The other campuses include: Saddleback College, Coastline Community College, Golden

West College, Orange Coast College, El Camino College, Cal State Long Beach and Cal State Dominguez Hills.

Nathan Jensen, senior director of the Center for International Education at CSU Long Beach, which has about 1,200 foreign students, said he was surprised to hear how widespread the alleged visa fraud case was.

"You always hear about rumors of this, that students will try to have somebody else take a test for them in certain circumstances. But I haven't ever known of any cases or students here," he said. "I would think that it would be

more isolated or unusual."

Jensen said the required placement tests have a reputation for being difficult, but the campus provides help for international students who are struggling, such as tutoring and preparation courses. Authorities said Higgins and his staff took Cal State placement exams in addition to tests required by the federal government.

Foreigners who want to study in the US must be accepted to a college or a university, apply for a student visa and pass an English proficiency exam. They must attend school full-time

to keep their visas valid, or face deportation.

The investigation into Higgins began last summer after police in Daly City, California, found a wallet with several fake California driver's licenses, all bearing a photo of Higgins' nephew, according to a criminal complaint filed in the case. The names were listed in federal databases as being foreigners on student visas and studying at various campuses in California.

During a search at Higgins' house, agents seized computers, graded college exams, 60 fraudulent California driver's licenses, spiral notebooks with course notes, Scantron test

forms and a check from a foreign student made payable to cash, according to court documents.

In e-mails, Higgins allegedly pledged that the students would get B grades or be given a discount, the documents said.

Higgins told investigators that he had been working as a tutor when he met the first students and then word spread about his service, Parker said. His ability to balance course work and pass tests, she said, made him popular among foreign students.

Oddly enough, Parker said, Higgins never went to college himself.