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IN BRIEF

Supreme Court to hear commandments case

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court said Tuesday it will consider whether the Ten Commandments may be displayed on government property, ending a 25-year silence on a church-state issue that has prompted bitter legal fights around the country. Ten Commandments displays are common in town squares and courthouses and on other government-owned land, including the Supreme Court. A wall carving of Moses holding the tablets is in the courtroom where justices will hear arguments in the case.

Libya to demilitarize after sanctions are lifted

TRIPOLI, Libya -- The son of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi proposed a new plan for general reforms in which he said his country will move away from the Middle East and reduce spending on the military. "Libya has decided to separate from the so-called Middle East," Seif al-Islam Gadhafi said at the opening session of a Tripoli conference for business leaders from Western countries. Gadhafi said he is proposing a

new reform plan that will include major cuts in military expenditure.

"There is no need anymore to continue spending on the military field," he said. "Instead, we will direct such spending to development."

The conference opened a day after the European Union ended 12 years of sanctions against Libya and eased an arms embargo to reward the North African country for giving up efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Hussein underwent hernia operation

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Saddam Hussein underwent an operation to repair a hernia about 10 days ago but has made a full recovery, Iraqi sources said Tuesday. The ousted dictator was taken to the Ibn Sina hospital near the U.S.-controlled Green Zone for the procedure, which was performed by Iraqi doctors, according to sources close to the Human Rights Ministry.

CDC flu plan aims to guard those at risk

WASHINGTON — The government moved Tuesday to direct scarce remaining flu shots straight to pediatricians, nursing homes and other places that care for the patients who need them most. But only a fraction of the 22.4 million doses that maker Aventis Pasteur has yet to ship can be diverted to areas with the biggest shortages. And officials acknowledged Tuesday that even if planned rationing

goes well, there will be high-risk patients who struggle to get shots but can't find them.

Students hospitalized after school bus accident

CLERMONT-FERRAND, France — Fifteen high school students were hospitalized Tuesday, two in serious condition, after their school bus veered off the road to avoid an oncoming car and overturned in central France, authorities said.

Police were investigating. The bus was carrying 20 students. Two were seriously injured, and 13 others, aged between 11 and 15, were under observation in hospitals.

Jean-Yves Fraquet, a local official in the Puy-de-Dome region, said the accident could have been worse because the bus came to a stop just before a ravine.

U.S. steps up attacks before Ramadan

BAGHDAD, Iraq — U.S. troops went on the offensive from the gates of Baghdad to the Syrian border Tuesday, pounding Sunni insurgent positions from the air and supporting Iraqi soldiers in raids on mosques suspected of harboring extremists. American and Iraqi forces launched the operations ahead of Ramadan, expected to start at week's end, in an apparent attempt at preventing a repeat of the insurgent violence that took place at the start of last year's Muslim holy month.

— The Associated Press

Iraqi militant tape of beheading found on Internet

Insurgents release unverified video footage of two gunmen decapitating an Arab Shiite Muslim

BY MAGGIE MICHAEL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CAIRO, Egypt — A videotape surfaced on the Internet Tuesday showing what was said to be the confession and beheading of an Arab Shiite Muslim, presumably Iraqi, whom the insurgents accused of working with the U.S. military.

The video's authenticity could not be verified, but it was posted in the name of the Ansar al-Sunnah Army, on a Web site where such militant content is often released. It showed a man, who identified himself as Al-Sayed Alaa al-Malki, kneeling in front of two masked gunmen.

Two identification cards were hanging from the man's gray shirt. One of them bore the name al-Malki and said "local sheik." It also had a photograph that showed him wearing a black robe and a white turban similar to those worn by Shiite clerics.

The bearded, heavyset man, his face bruised and dark circles under his eyes, spoke in a shaky voice of ties to a Shiite militia and to a former U.S. military commander in Iraq. Then, he was shown held down on his back, his face covered with a white sheet and his head being cut off. Afterward, the sheet was removed to show his face.

The death was part of an upsurge in decapitations of both foreigners and Iraqis that have swept Iraq since last spring.

Insurgents in Iraq have kidnapped more than 150 foreigners in their campaign to drive out coalition forces and hamper reconstruction. Many Iraqis also have been killed on suspicion of cooperating with U.S.-led forces in Iraq, but Internet videos of beheadings generally have been of foreigners abducted to pressure foreign governments or companies to stop doing business with the Americans.

In the video posted Tuesday, the man, whose accent was Iraqi, said he was a follower of Iraqi Shiite cleric

Muqtada al-Sadr. He said he "had close relationship with the Sadr army ... and relations with political leaders such as (Lt. Gen. Ricardo) Sanchez."

Sanchez was replaced as head of U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq on July 1 by Gen. George Casey. He remains commander of the Army's V corps, based in Germany.

In Baghdad, an al-Sadr aide, Abdul Hadi al-Daraji, told The Associated Press he couldn't immediately verify that the cleric belonged to al-Sadr's camp.

"I have not heard of him before, but I am contacting other al-Sadr followers," he said.

Al-Daraji condemned those who carry out beheadings, regardless of al-Malki's affiliation.

"These people do not serve Islam. They blemish the reputation of Islam," he said. "This is proof that they do not represent resistance to occupation, but rather aim at inciting strife."

The video showed the man saying he worked with an American military officer named Paul, with whom he allegedly established a "Citizens Claims Office" that was used as a cover "to collect and buy weapons from the street, and sell them to the American army."

A statement purportedly from the Ansar al-Sunnah Army that accompanied the video said al-Malki was killed because "he used the Citizens Claims Office as an underground tunnel — during his work with the American forces — to assassinate a number of Sunni leaders."

The statement was more of a message showing the group's antagonism toward the Shiite religious sect; the same message was conveyed in an audio tape posted on another Islamic Web site in July by the spiritual adviser of Tawhid and Jihad, Abu Anas al-Shami. In the audio, he attacked Shiites, cursed and accused them of attacks on Sunnis and said they are allied with the U.S.-led forces.

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