

High Court Stops Juvenile Executions

Death penalty for youths ruled 'cruel and unusual'

(AP) - The Supreme Court ruled Tuesday that the Constitution forbids the execution of killers who were under 18 when they committed their crimes, ending a practice used in 19 states.

The 5-4 decision throws out the death

sentences of about 70 juvenile murderers and bars states from seeking to execute minors for future crimes.

The executions, the court said, violate the Eighth Amendment ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

In 1988, the court outlawed executions for those 15 and younger when they committed their crimes. Three years ago justices banned executions of the mentally retarded.

Tuesday's ruling prevents states from

making 16- and 17-year-olds eligible for execution.

"The age of 18 is the point where society draws the line for many purposes between childhood and adulthood. It is, we conclude, the age at which the line for death eligibility ought to rest," Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote.

Juvenile offenders have been put to death in recent years in only a few other countries, including Iran, Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia. Kennedy cited interna-

tional opposition to the practice.

"It is proper that we acknowledge the overwhelming weight of international opinion against the juvenile death penalty, resting in large part on the understanding that the instability and emotional imbalance of young people may often be a factor in the crime," he wrote.

Kennedy noted most states don't allow the execution of juvenile killers and those that do use the penalty infrequently. The trend, he said, is to abolish the practice

because "our society views juveniles... as categorically less culpable than the average criminal."

In a dissent, Justice Antonin Scalia disputed that there is a clear trend of declining juvenile executions to justify a growing consensus against the practice.

Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justices Clarence Thomas and Sandra Day O'Connor, joined Scalia in the losing opinion to allow the executions.

Worst Insurgency Bombing Kills 120

(AP) - Weeping and beating their chests, hundreds of Iraqis inspected corpses at a hospital morgue in Hillah on Tuesday, looking for friends and relatives missing in a suicide bombing that killed at least 120 people, the single deadliest attack in the two-year insurgency.

Meanwhile, the toll rose as hospital officials said at least five succumbed to wounds overnight. More than 140 others were injured in the blast, which targeted mostly Shiite police and National Guard recruits lined up for physicals at a medical clinic.

Monday's bombing presented the boldest challenge yet to Iraq's efforts to build a security force that

can take over from the Americans.

At the morgue, distraught relatives placed the dead into coffins and loaded them onto pickup trucks for the trip to mosques and homes where the bodies will be washed before burial, a Muslim tradition in Iraq.

The bombing comes as the Sunni Arab insurgency tries to disrupt the formation of the first government led by majority Shiites. The Shiites have refrained from striking back — mostly at the behest of their most revered leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. He wants nothing to impede Shiites from coming to power and will not allow them to engage in a sectarian war.



Iraqis mourn near the site of a suicide bombing that killed more than 120 people. (AP photo)

HIV Doubles Among Blacks

Stark evidence shows widening of racial gap

(AP) - The HIV infection rate has doubled among blacks in the United States over a decade while holding steady among whites - stark evidence of a widening racial gap in the epidemic, government scientists said Friday.

Other troubling statistics indicate that almost half of all infected people in the United States who should be receiving HIV drugs are not getting them.

The findings were released in Boston at the 12th Annual Retrovirus Conference, the world's chief scientific gathering on the disease.

Researchers and AIDS prevention advocates attributed the high rate among blacks to such factors as drug addiction, poverty and poor access to health care.

The HIV rates were derived from the widely used National Health and Nutrition Examinations Surveys, which analyze a representative sample of U.S. households and contain the most complete HIV data in the country. Researchers at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention compared 1988-1994 data with figures from 1999-2002.



The AIDS virus in blacks has risen from 1 to 2 percent.

The surveys look only at young and middle-aged adults who live in households, excluding such groups as soldiers, prisoners and homeless. Thus, health officials believe the numbers probably underestimate true HIV rates in this country.

Still, they show a striking rise in the prevalence of the AIDS virus from 1 percent to 2 percent of blacks. White rates held steady at 0.2 percent. Largely because of the increase among blacks, the overall U.S. rate rose slightly from 0.3 percent to 0.4 percent.

Treatment is widely viewed as a central component in prevention. Powerful AIDS drugs that came into wide use in the mid-1990s can knock down levels of the virus in the body, reducing the chances that the patient will infect others.

Nearly 1 million people in the United States have contracted the AIDS virus since the outbreak began in the early 1980s. About 40,000 people test positive each year, and more than 18,000 die.

Local Rapper Shot 12 Times, Survives

Police are on the hunt for the suspect who shot local rapper Ladarius Davis, 24, who performs under the name Korbell. He was shot a dozen times after

getting into an argument at a local bar, family members say.

Davis survived the shooting and underwent multiple surgeries at Legacy Emanuel Hospital.

Police conclude that the crime occurred in the vicinity of North Interstate Avenue and Skidmore Street and was gang-related, although family members don't

believe Davis was involved in gangs.

Police are still gathering information on a possible suspect.



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Human Rights Abuses

(AP) - Man's inhumanity to man was documented anew Monday by the U.S. State Department as it surveyed human rights abuses last year in scores of countries and found systematic torture in Syria, serious abuses in China and the killing of civilians by government-backed militia in Sudan's troubled Darfur province.

Egypt, a close ally of the United States in Mideast peacemaking, was condemned for security forces torturing prisoners and for mass arrests. Iran's "poor human rights record worsened," the State Department report said.

North Korea, which President Bush has denounced as part of an "axis of evil," is one of the world's most repressive and brutal regimes, the report said. An estimated 150,000 to 200,000 people are believed to be in detention camps in remote areas, and defectors report many have died from torture, starvation and disease.

China used war on terror as a pretext for cracking down on peaceful Uighur separatists and does not permit outsiders to monitor the human rights situation in the country, the report to Congress added.

Judge's Family Murdered

(AP) - A federal judge who was once the target of a failed murder plot by a white supremacist was under marshals' protection Tuesday following the shooting deaths of her husband and 89-year-old mother, and investigators were looking into possible connections to hate groups, among other leads.

U.S. District Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow found the bodies of Michael F. Lefkow, 65, and her mother, Donna Humphrey,

when she returned home from work Monday evening, according to authorities and friends.

White supremacist Matthew Hale, 33, who was convicted in April 2004 of soliciting an undercover FBI informant to kill her, is awaiting sentencing on murder solicitation and obstruction of justice.

Authorities acknowledged the possibility that hate groups could be involved in the killings but cautioned against early conclusions.

Congo Peacekeepers Killed

(AP) - Attackers ambushed U.N. peacekeepers on patrol in northeastern Congo on Friday, killing nine Bangladeshis in the deadliest assault on the world body's largest peacekeeping mission, the United Nations said.

The slain peacekeepers were among 21 Bangladeshis patrolling near a camp housing civilians displaced by persistent fight-

ing in Ituri province.

Since 1999, fighting in the vast northeastern district of Ituri has killed more than 50,000 and forced 500,000 to flee their homes, U.N. officials and human rights groups say.

There are 11,415 U.N. troops in Congo - the largest U.N. peacekeeping mission, with the force eventually expected to reach 16,000.