

World News Roundup

Terror

'Minimal role'

Hamza aide gets 20 'yrs'

NEW YORK, Oct. 17, (AFP): A Briton convicted over an attempt to set up a jihad training camp in the US on orders from hate preacher Abu Hamza was sentenced to 20 years in prison Friday in New York.



Hamza

Hamza Aswat, who suffers from paranoid schizophrenia, cut a despondent figure in the Manhattan federal court, dressed in a faded prison shirt and wearing his long dark hair plaited in braids.

The 41-year-old has already spent 11 years in custody meaning that he could qualify for early release in six years. His lawyer said he would apply for Aswat to serve out his sentence in Britain.

First arrested in Zambia in 2005, Aswat was extradited last year to the United States where he pleaded guilty in March to one count of providing material support to al-Qaeda and one count of conspiring to support the terror group.

Apologized

In a brief statement, Aswat apologized for breaking US law and causing "distress" to friends and family, and said he looked forward to finding a wife, and settling down.

He said he opposed violence against innocent people and recited a prayer learnt in childhood, opening his statement in Arabic in the name of God and closing with a simple "amen."

In 1999-2000, Aswat spent about two months in Seattle and Bly, Oregon at the behest of the radical London cleric Abu Hamza as part of a plot to set up a training camp for recruits wanting to fight in Afghanistan.

Following his return to London, he traveled to Afghanistan and Pakistan in mid-2001 in order to attend a training camp.

Prosecutors depicted Aswat as a man "at the right-hand of Abu Hamza" with a thirst for violent jihad who kept "a host of disturbing literature" on his computer.

Aswat came to the United States "at the direction of one of the world's most dangerous terrorist leaders" and could pose a danger when he is released, prosecutors argued on Friday.

Aswat was previously held at Broadmoor, a high-security British psychiatric hospital.

Child-like

His lawyer Peter Quijano told the court his client never tried to join Al-Qaeda, describing him as a "child-like" individual who embraced a "hippy lifestyle" and "self-medicated" with marijuana.

After the 9/11 attacks and the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, Aswat fled to South Africa, where he had family, and embarked on a life as an itinerant salesman of pirated CDs of Islamic chants and prayer, said the defense lawyer.

Quijano told reporters he would request his client's transfer to Britain, where Aswat's parents are based.

US District Judge Katherine Forrest said it was "of the greatest importance" that he receive specialist psychiatric care and that the court would support him serving out his sentence in Britain.

The defense called for Aswat's immediate release given that he has already spent a quarter of his life in prison.

Quijano said Aswat was held at least three times in isolation in the United States, despite promises to the contrary, including one five-day period in which he did not receive medication.

Aswat's lawyer told the court his client never aligned himself with violence but had "felt sorry" for the one-armed Abu Hamza, becoming his assistant "doing day-to-day chores."

Quijano called the Bly plot "pathetic and laughable" and said all his client had done was teach Islam, Arabic and the Holy Quran. "What did he do there? It was minimal," he said.

American government officials say Aswat was included on a list of people associated with al-Qaeda recovered from a safe house used by 9/11 plotter Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in Pakistan.

Forrest sentenced Abu Hamza to life behind bars in January for the fatal kidnapping of Western tourists in Yemen and on a slew of terror charges, calling him "evil" and his crimes "barbaric."



Maj Lisa Jaster holds her 3-year-old daughter Victoria and her 7-year-old son Zachary after an Army Ranger School graduation ceremony, on Oct 16, in Fort Benning, Ga. Jaster, who is the first Army Reserve female to graduate the Army's Ranger School, joins US Army Capt Kristen Griest and First Lt Shayne Haver as the third female soldier to complete the school. (Inset): Maj Lisa Jaster holds a letter her 7-year-old son Zachary wrote her while she was in Army Ranger School after an Army Ranger school graduation ceremony on Oct 16. (AP)

Justice

NY's jails still plagued by violence: city officials

Reform 'unfair' system: Obama

WASHINGTON, Oct 17, (Agencies): President Barack Obama urged reform of the US criminal justice system Saturday, saying much of it "remains unfair" and that punishments should correspond to the severity of crimes.

"The United States is home to five percent of the world's population, but 25 percent of the world's prisoners," Obama said in his weekly radio address. "Every year, we spend \$80 billion to keep people locked up."

The president said the reason the United States has such a high prison population — 2.2 million — is that more non-violent offenders have been put behind bars over the past decades than ever before. Despite efforts to address the matter, "much of our criminal justice system remains unfair," Obama said. "In recent years, more of our eyes have been opened to this truth. We can't close them anymore."

He called on the Republican-controlled Congress to send reform bills to his desk to sign into law and said he would be traveling around the country to highlight the issue in the coming weeks.

Among other things, "justice means that the punishment should fit the crime," Obama said.

"And justice means allowing our fellow Americans who have made mistakes to pay their debt to society, and

rejoin their community as active, rehabilitated citizens."

Obama's comments came as the United States prepares to release thousands of prisoners considered at low risk of returning to crime, as part of an effort to ease prison overcrowding and redress overly harsh sentences.

The measure stands to benefit petty criminals and drug users sentenced to long prison terms for minor, non-violent offenses.

The release comes after the US Sentencing Commission, which sets policy for federal crimes, reduced its sentencing guidelines for drug possession.

Increased

While the US population has increased by 30 percent since 1980, the country's prison population jumped 800 percent during the same period. The result is a record rate of incarceration for an industrialized country, which has overburdened the federal prison system.

Violence has continued to rise in New York City's jails including Rikers Island despite a declining inmate population and millions of dollars spent to address the problem, according to a report released by a city official who called the situation "completely out of hand."

The number of assaults by inmates on guards in the city's jails rose 46 per-

cent and use-of-force incidents by uniformed personnel increased 27 percent in fiscal year 2015, which ended June 30, compared to the prior year, the report released on Friday by city Comptroller Scott Stringer showed.

Widespread

Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration has made reforming the city's jails a priority in response to widespread allegations of violence at Rikers Island, one of the country's biggest jail complexes, which houses the vast majority of the city's inmates.

"This is the second year in a row that we have seen an escalation of disturbing trends," Stringer said in a statement. "With costs per inmate that are twice as high as many other cities, it is clear the situation at New York City jails is completely out of hand."

The report found the city spent \$112,665 per inmate during the 2015 fiscal year, more than twice what cities like Philadelphia and Los Angeles spend. The inmate population dropped to a 31-year low of 10,240.

Monica Klein, a spokeswoman for the mayor, said inmate fights and use-of-force incidents had decreased since January. She also said guards were causing serious injuries less often when using force, showing better train-

ing is having an impact.

"Meaningful reform takes time, and we are confident the commissioner is creating safer and more supportive jails for our staff and inmates alike," she said of Joseph Ponte, the city's corrections commissioner.

Dozens of guards have been charged by local and federal authorities with corruption and assault. This week, a former officer was sentenced to 3-1/2 months in prison for sneaking marijuana and other banned items into Rikers, while two guards were convicted in connection with a 2009 beating that left an inmate blind in one eye.

In June, the city settled a civil rights lawsuit brought by Preet Bharara, the US attorney in Manhattan, by agreeing to several reforms including a federal monitor for the city's jails.

No executions will be scheduled in Oklahoma until at least next year, as the attorney general's office investigates why the state used the wrong drug during a lethal injection in January and nearly did so again last month, the office said Friday.

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The Old Governor's Mansion State Historic Park is seen in Sacramento, California, on Oct 16. The governor's office announced, Friday, that Gov Jerry Brown, his wife, Anne Gust Brown and their two dogs will move into the mansion after completion of a \$1.6 million renovation, later this year. The mansion, built in 1877, has not housed a chief executive since Ronald Reagan in 1967. (AP)



Ige



Harper

North America

'No birth certificates': A federal judge has chosen for now not to force Texas health officials to change their stance in denying birth certificates to immigrant families with US-born children, saying that the families raised "grave concerns" but more evidence is needed, according to a ruling issued Friday.

US District Judge Robert Pitman denied an emergency injunction on behalf of immigrant families seeking birth certificates for their children after the Department of State Health Services refused to recognize as valid certain forms of identification.

The families' lawyers had asked for the judge to intervene, saying that the children's right to health care, travel, and schooling - along with parental rights - are being harmed. (AP)

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US to announce new initiative:

The Obama administration, faced with a surge in unauthorized drone flights, will announce a new initiative on Monday aimed at registering the owners of unmanned aerial systems (UAS), people familiar with the matter said on Friday, in Washington.

The announcement is expected to be made by US Treasury Secretary Anthony

Foxx and Michael Huerta, administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, at a news conference attended by members of the drone industry. (RTRS)

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Ige declares state of emergency:

Hawaii Gov David Ige has declared a state of emergency to deal with the state's homelessness crisis just days after city and state officials cleared one of the nation's largest homeless encampments.

The declaration will help the state speed up the process of building a homeless shelter for families, and the state is considering four possible sites, Ige said at a news conference Friday.

"We are making sure that we have

options for those who are homeless to move into an emergency shelter, and the biggest deficit in the system is shelter space for families," Ige said. (AP)

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Mom throws baby: A 27-year-old woman allegedly threw her baby daughter to her death from the window of their sixth-floor apartment, the third such tragedy in as many months in the city.

Tenisha Fearon — who ignored the pleas of her horrified neighbors — has been charged with murder after the death of the six-month-old on Thursday in the Bronx.

Her three other young children, aged four, eight and 10 and who were present at the time, have been placed in care. (AFP)

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14-yr-old pleads guilty to killing an Iraqi boy

BUFFALO, New York, Oct 17, (AP): A 14-year-old has pleaded guilty to killing a 13-year-old boy whose family had immigrated to the US to escape the war in Iraq.

Jean Sanchez pleaded guilty Friday in Erie County Court in Buffalo, New York, to second-degree murder in the slaying of Ameer Al-Shammari in May 2014. Sanchez was 13 when Ameer was killed. He was charged as an adult, but the maximum sentence he faces because of his age is nine years to life in prison.

Prosecutors say Ameer was trying to get his stolen cellphone back when Sanchez knocked him down, tied him up with his own shoelaces, sodomized him and strangled him with the string from Ameer's hooded sweatshirt.



Sarah Ferguson and Joseph Irwin stand in front of Judge Bill M. Virkler during a hearing on Oct 16, in New Hartford, NY. Bruce Leonard and his wife Deborah Leonard have been charged with fatally beating their 19-year-old son inside a church, while Ferguson and Irwin are two of four fellow church members who have been charged with assault in an attack that also left the young man's brother severely injured. (AP)