

CHINA TO GIVE PARENTS OF EXECUTED MAN \$330,000

BEIJING: A Chinese court will give the parents of a teenager wrongfully executed for murder and rape 18 years ago more than two million yuan (\$330,000) compensation, it said yesterday. Hujijitu, who was convicted, sentenced and executed in 1996 at the age of 18, was exonerated earlier this month by a court in Inner Mongolia, nine years after another person confessed to the crime, in a case that highlighted flaws in

China's legal system.

The court which cleared the teenager on grounds of "insufficient evidence," said in an online post that his parents would receive 2,059,621.40 yuan in compensation yesterday. It did not explain how the precise figure was reached. Acquittals in China's Communist-controlled court system are extremely rare 99.93 percent of defendants in criminal cases were found guilty last year,

according to official statistics.

The use of force to extract confessions remains widespread in the country and defendants often do not have effective defence in criminal trials, leading to regular miscarriages of justice. China has occasionally exonerated wrongfully executed convicts after others came forward to confess their crimes, or in some cases because the supposed murder victim was later found alive.

But the Communist Party is attempting to reduce public anger over injustices by lessening the influence of local officials over some court cases, and reversing verdicts in some high-profile cases. A Chinese man who was freed after six years on death row following a wrongful murder conviction is seeking \$2.4 million in compensation, state-run media said last week.

In Hujijitu's case, authorities interro-

gated the teenager for 48 hours, after which he confessed to having raped and choked the woman in the toilet of a textile factory, the state-run China Daily newspaper reported in November. He was executed 61 days after the woman's death. Hujijitu's family tried for nearly a decade to prove his innocence, according to reports, and the Inner Mongolia Higher People's Court officially began a retrial in November. —AFP

FIRST BODIES FROM AIRASIA PLANE ARRIVE IN SURABAYA

BAD WEATHER HAMPERS RECOVERY

SURABAYA, Indonesia: Soldiers acting as pall bearers yesterday carried coffins containing the first two bodies from AirAsia Flight QZ8501 into Surabaya airport from where the ill-fated plane departed, as sombre relatives gave their DNA to help identify loved ones. The bodies were taken from an air force plane to a military ambulance to be transported to a hospital for examination and identification - but many exhausted families were left waiting for news as bad

daughter-in-law Enny Wahyuni. "I am anxious to know if the rescuers have found their bodies. The president has said that they will do the best they can to find them," Widjaja told AFP. "But if they really cannot find them, I will scatter flowers in the sea here as a way to say goodbye."

Police in Surabaya said they had taken DNA from 30 immediate family members to assist with the identification of bodies, which is set to take place at a hospital in

Pangkalan Bun, Sunarbowo Sandi, told reporters they had recovered a total of seven bodies. According to search and rescue officials AFP spoke with, none of the victims found so far was wearing a lifejacket.

Debris found so far from the aircraft, which crashed into the Java Sea southwest of the island of Borneo during a storm, included an exit door and several suitcases. "There were snacks, instant porridge, and three umbrellas," com-

cerns to secure the flight recorders, believed to be with parts of the plane we haven't found," said Soelistyo.

Britain's Air Accidents Investigation Branch has sent an investigator carrying "specialist technical equipment" that can help to locate flight recorders. Accompanying Singaporean experts, the investigator is travelling to the site on an Indonesian naval vessel, according to the British embassy in Jakarta. Before take-off the pilot of QZ8501 had asked for permission to fly at a higher altitude to avoid the storm, but his request was not approved due to other planes above him on the popular route, according to AirNav, Indonesia's air traffic control. In his last communication, the pilot said he wanted to change course to avoid the menacing storm system. Then all contact was lost, about 40 minutes after the plane had taken off.

'Unique Weather Conditions'

"There were some very unique weather conditions and let's wait for the investigation to be concluded," AirAsia's boss Tony Fernandes told reporters on Tuesday in Surabaya, after meeting with relatives. "This is a scar with me for the rest of my life," he said. The missing plane was operated by AirAsia Indonesia, a unit of Malaysia-based AirAsia, which had previously earned a solid safety record. Of the 162 passengers and crew on board Flight QZ8501, 155 were Indonesian. President Joko Widodo also met the victims' families in Surabaya on Tuesday and promised "a massive search" effort, with priority given to recovering bodies of the passengers and crew.

The United States, Australia, Singapore, South Korea and Malaysia are among the countries helping in the search effort, which comes at the end of an awful year for Malaysian air travel. After the disappearance of Flight MH370 in March, en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing with 239 passengers and crew, another Malaysia Airlines flight - MH17 - was shot down over Ukraine in July, killing all 298 on board. —AFP



SURABAYA: Indonesian soldiers carry coffins containing bodies of victims of AirAsia Flight 8501 upon arrival at the Indonesian military air force base yesterday. —AFP

weather hampered search efforts.

Officials had hoped to recover most of the bodies but rough conditions made it difficult for helicopters to fly over the area in the Java Sea where several corpses and debris from the ill-fated Airbus A320-200 were found a day earlier. In Indonesia's second-biggest city Surabaya, where the plane had departed for Singapore early on Sunday, drained and emotional relatives of the 162 people on board gathered at a crisis centre to hand over documents and medical records.

Among them was Hadi Widjaja, 60, who was preparing a Muslim funeral for his son Andreas and

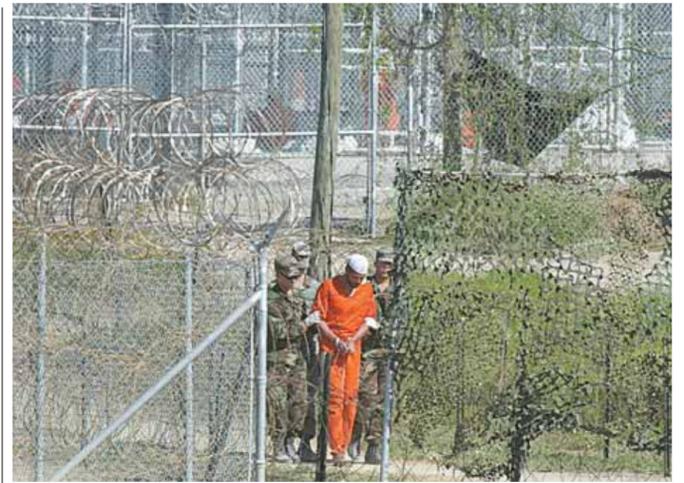
Surabaya. Two of the recovered bodies were being flown there on Wednesday afternoon. Storms delayed the start of operations yesterday and helicopters were later forced to return to the base in Pangkalan Bun, the town with the nearest airstrip to the crash site.

'We Turned Back'

"For the safety reasons, we turned back," helicopter pilot Tatang Onne Setiawan told AFP. "Besides the evacuation of the bodies, we also planned to search for bigger parts of the plane." Boat-based teams were still trying to make progress around the crash site. A search and rescue official at

mander of the Bung Tomo warship, Colonel Yayan, told a local news channel, referring to the 28 items that had been retrieved. National Search and Rescue Agency chief Bambang Soelistyo told reporters the fuselage had not been found, denying reports that sonar imagery showed the aircraft on the seabed.

During Tuesday's searches, an air force plane had seen a "shadow" on the seabed believed to be the missing plane, where all search efforts were now being concentrated, he said earlier. The hunt is now on for the plane's black boxes, which are key to determining the cause of the crash. "We have con-



GUANTANAMO, Cuba: In this March 1, 2002 file photo, a detainee is escorted to interrogation by US military guards at Camp X-Ray at the Guantanamo Bay US naval base. —AP

US TRANSFERS FIVE GITMO DETAINEES TO KAZAKHSTAN

WASHINGTON: Two Tunisian and three Yemeni detainees have been transferred from the US-run prison at Guantanamo Bay to Kazakhstan, the Pentagon said. The former Guantanamo inmates, who were flown on a US military aircraft, arrived in Kazakhstan on Tuesday at 11:15 pm Washington time (0415 GMT), US officials said. Their transfer is part of President Barack Obama's push to close the controversial military prison, which was set up to detain terror suspects after the Sept 11, 2001 attacks.

"We are determined to responsibly reduce the detainee population and you can expect additional transfers over the coming weeks," an administration official told AFP. The Pentagon said in a statement that the five men "were unanimously approved for transfer" after a thorough review by a task force of several US government agencies. The transfer of the five detainees leaves 127 inmates at the prison, located at a US naval base in southeast Cuba.

The number of detainees transferred out of Guantanamo in 2014 is now at 28. Details of what Kazakhstan had agreed to and what security steps the government might take related to the former detainees remained unclear. The five inmates, who have never been tried in court and who were cleared for transfer by authorities in 2010 or even earlier, have spent more than 11 years at the Guantanamo prison, which human rights groups have condemned as a "legal black hole". The facility is approaching its 13th anniversary, as the first detainees arrived on Jan 11, 2002. Of the 127 inmates still held there, 59 are cleared to be transferred to their home countries or third countries. With the release of the two Tunisian detainees, there is only one Tunisian national still held at the prison. At one point, there were 12 Tunisian inmates at the jail. Yemeni detainees are the largest group at Guantanamo, with 80 inmates identified as Yemeni nationals, of which 50 are considered ready to be transferred. But US authorities have concerns over security given the volatile situation in Yemen.

The Pentagon identified the Tunisian nationals transferred Tuesday as Adel Al-Hakeemy, and Abdullah bin Ali Al-Lufti, also known as Lofti bin Ali. Authorities had approved the repatriation of Ali in 2006. But a US federal judge in 2007 blocked his transfer, saying he would likely face torture and "irreparable harm" at the hands of Tunisian authorities. Ali, 49, has a pacemaker, suffers heart rhythm problems and takes blood thinning medication. He has strongly denied

having any links to Al-Qaeda and insisted he had travelled to Pakistan to buy medicine when he was arrested by authorities there after the 9/11 attacks. His compatriot, Hakeemy, also known as Hkimi, 49, had been described by US authorities as a "veteran terrorist" who had allegedly taken part in fighting in Bosnia and was accused of links with an Algerian Islamist group. But he has maintained he was working as a cook in Italy and had gone to Pakistan to find a wife. He was arrested by Pakistani authorities near the Afghan border and held at Guantanamo for more than 12 years. Both he and his fellow Tunisian detainee had lived in Italy as immigrants.

The three Yemenis who were transferred were identified as Asim Thabit Abdullah Al-Khalaqi, Muhammad Ali Husayn Khanayna and Sabri Muhammad Ibrahim Al-Qurashi. Khalaqi, 46, born in Saudi Arabia, had been suspected of serving in Osama bin Laden's Arab brigade. Arrested in Dec 2001 in the company of a senior Al-Qaeda figure, he has been behind bars at Guantanamo since Jan 17, 2002, among the first inmates to be sent to the prison at Guantanamo Bay.

The second Yemeni to be transferred out is Muhammad Ali Husayn Khanayna, 46, also known as Muhammed Ali Hussein Khnenah, who has been held at the prison since June 2002. He was arrested at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in December 2001. US authorities alleged he was present at Bin Laden's hideout in the Tora Bora mountains and that he had stayed at guesthouses known to serve Al-Qaeda extremists.

The third Yemeni detainee transferred was Sabri Muhammad Ibrahim Al-Qurashi, 44, who had been suspected of membership in Al-Qaeda and undergoing instruction at one of the group's training camps. He was arrested by Pakistani authorities at a known Qaeda safe house in February 2002 and was sent to Guantanamo in May of that year.

The transfers came just days after Obama's envoy overseeing the release of Guantanamo inmates, Cliff Sloan, resigned from his post. Sloan had reportedly become frustrated at the slow pace of transfers, which have to be approved by the Pentagon. Outgoing Pentagon chief Chuck Hagel, who resigned in November, had reportedly come under pressure from the White House to move more swiftly to approve proposed transfers of detainees. —AFP

KOREAN AIR BOSS' DAUGHTER DETAINED IN 'NUT RAGE' CASE

SEOUL: The daughter of the chairman of Korean Air Lines, whose outburst over the way she was served nuts in first class prompted widespread outrage and ridicule, was in custody yesterday facing charges of violating aviation safety. Heather Cho, 40, former head of in-flight service, had demanded

the chief steward be removed from the flight at John F Kennedy airport in New York on Dec. 5 after another flight attendant in first class served her macadamia nuts in a bag, not a dish. In what media dubbed the "nut rage" incident, the Airbus A380, which had pushed back from its gate, returned for

the chief attendant to disembark, arriving in South Korea 11 minutes late. "The necessity for detention is recognized as the case is grave and there has been an attempt to systematically cover up charges from the beginning," Lee Kwang-woo, a judge at Seoul Western District Court, said in a text message. She can be held for up to 20 days before prosecutors bring charges.

The Transport Ministry had concluded that Cho abused flight attendants and that airline officials may have tried to cover up the episode. Another airline official was detained over allegations that he abetted perjury and obtained information on the ministry's probe to update Cho. The Cho family, one of South Korea's most powerful, faced fresh criticism yesterday after media said her sister, also an executive with the airline, had sent a text message to Cho on Dec 17 saying: "I will surely take revenge."

Emily Cho apologized yesterday on Twitter: "I am sorry beyond words for the content of my text message that was reported in today's newspaper. I don't want to make any excuses. It is all my fault". Korean Air had no comment and said that Emily Cho was not available to comment.

Flanked by prosecution officials after the court's detention order late on Tuesday, Heather Cho said "sorry" several times, her head bowed. The Transport Ministry came under fire after revelations that some of its officials leaked information to the company. Cho's case aggravated resentment towards family-run conglomerates, stirred by their dominance of the economy and a widening wealth gap. An official at the facility where Cho was being held said she would not receive special treatment. "Whoever comes here, whether it is Cho Hyun-ah (Heather Cho)...they are treated equally." —Reuters



SEOUL: Korean Air heiress Cho Hyun-Ah is surrounded by journalists at a court on Tuesday after her hearing to review an arrest warrant application on charges including violation of the aviation safety law, coercion and interference in the execution of duty. —AFP

TOP OFFICIAL IN XINJIANG TRANSFERRED

BEIJING: The second most senior official in China's strife-torn Xinjiang region has been transferred, reports said yesterday, after the area saw some of its worst violence in decades. Nur Bekri will be replaced as the area's vice Communist Party secretary by Shohrat Zakir, the official Xinhua news agency reported. Both men are Uighurs, the nine-million-strong Turkic-speaking and mostly Muslim ethnic minority which counts Xinjiang as its homeland.

Bekri will become deputy director of the National Development and Reform Commission, China's top economic planning agency, as well as head of the National Energy Agency, Caixin magazine said. Such a move would make him one of the most powerful ethnic minority members of China's central government. Violence linked to Xinjiang has intensified over the past year, with at least 200 people killed in a series of clashes and increasingly sophisticated attacks in the resource-rich region and beyond it. Bekri was appointed to the party post in 2003 and became head of the regional government in 2008, retaining his job even as unrest spiralled, including 2009 riots between Uighurs and China's ethnic majority Han that left about 200 people dead. Zakir is also likely to replace him as

head of the Xinjiang regional government. The top official in Xinjiang remains Zhang Chunxian, who was appointed as regional party secretary in 2010 after his predecessor was sacked in a move widely seen as a bid to allay public anger following the riots.

Beijing, which blames Xinjiang-related violence on "religious extremists", "separatists" and "terrorists", has responded to the current series of incidents by launching a severe crackdown in recent months, with hundreds of arrests and around 50 death sentences handed down. The campaign has extended to academics such as prominent Uighur scholar Ilham Tohti, who in September was sentenced to life in prison for "separatism". Seven of Tohti's students have been jailed on the same charge.

Rights groups have condemned the targeting of Tohti, a respected economist and moderate who had long denounced the repression of Uighurs. They argue that harsh police treatment of the minority as well as government campaigns against religious practices such as the wearing of veils have led to violence. China denies repression, saying it has brought badly needed modernisation and economic development to the vast and landlocked region bordering Central Asia. —AFP