



IRON STRONG DAILY

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Dragoon warriors test mettle

**Story and photos by
Spc. Opal Vaughn
14th Public Affairs Detachment**

Your throat is dry and swallowing doesn't help at all. It hurts to breathe because your lungs feel like they're on fire. Beads of sweat roll

down the temples of your forehead.

Your boots feel like cement blocks as you slowly pick up one foot after another; each foot dragging against the rocky surface of the desert sand. The blisters on your feet scream in agony as they rub against the insides of your boots.

Can this be real? It's 125 degrees

outside and you are carrying over 60 pounds of gear meant to save a life.

Now, imagine doing this every day except bullets are flying around you and your battle buddy is calling out for medical assistance and everywhere you step might be a possible

See **Competition** on Page 3



Sgt. Wayne Racine, a field artillery surveyor with Charlie Battery, Fires squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, fires a round in the prone un-supported position during the Dragoon Warrior Competition at Forward Operating Base Warhorse located in the Diyala Province, Iraq. The competing Soldiers are required to fire in three different positions; prone supported, prone un-supported and the kneeling position.

Female IP conduct weapons training

**Courtesy story by
728th MP Bn., 18th MP Bde.**

Iraqi's first female police trainee's fire weapons during weapons familiarization training at the Multi-National Division-North Regional Training Center in Diyala Province Sept. 4, during a four-week Iraqi Police certification course.

As the training academy welcomed over 750 trainees this month, females for the first time were being trained side by side with their male colleagues.

The Iraqi Police course is four weeks of instruction that trains basic police skills to include basic rifle marksmanship

training. During this training, all students will be trained on how to shoot a Glock pistol, AK-47 automatic rifle and PKM machine gun on the local weapons range.

The female trainees were taught how to fire a PKM automatic machine gun and a 9 mm Glock.

"For many of the Iraqi women, this was the first time that they have handled a weapon," said Capt David Castillo, officer in charge RTC, 728th Military Police Battalion, 18th Military Police Brigade and MND-N.

While IP and CF Soldiers provided instruction to all 750 trainees, at the academy, the 21 new female trainees have shown a lot of potential at the range with some even showing marked proficiency.

"The female police trainees have shown great enthusiasm and are eager to learn," said Castillo.

In addition to weapons training at the IP training course, the female trainees and their male counterparts will be certified on basic personal defensive tactics, human rights and ethics, democratic policing, Iraqi Rule of Law and basic first aid.

As this range was used for familiarization and safety



Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Patricia L. Baiocchetti, 18th MP Bde.

A female military police Soldier, Spc. Britnney K. Lloyd, (right), 212th Military Police Company, 728th Military Police Battalion, 18th Military Police Brigade and MND-N, shows a female Iraqi Police trainee how to properly maintain a 9 mm Glock pistol at the Regional Training Center in Diyala province. The RTC class welcomed 21 female IP trainees for the first time during a four week certification course. There are 21 female IP trainees participating in a class of over 750 students training to become IP.



Photo by Spc. Britnney K. Lloyd, 18th MP Bde.

Las Vegas native, Sgt. 1st Class Patricia Baiocchetti, with 1175th Military Police Company, 728th MP Battalion, 18th MP Brigade, coaches a female IP trainee with loading a magazine into her weapon at the Regional Training Center in Diyala Province, Iraq.

awareness, the academy will conduct additional ranges this month to teach the 21 trainees how to perfect their shooting techniques and provide them with more hands on pre-maintenance inspections.

"Overall, the training was a success but they still need a lot of work," said Castillo. "Many of them have never handled a weapon before and some are still terrified of them."

The RTC is now in its forth class since opening in March 2007. In the upcoming months the CF will turn over full operations to the IP as they will be responsible for training and logistical functions of the Diyala Police Academy.

Commanding General: Maj. Gen. Mark P. Hertling
Public Affairs Officer: Maj. Margaret Kageleiry
Public Affairs NCOIC: Master Sgt. Nancy Morrison

Contributing Writers: Spc. Opal Vaughn, 18th MP Bde., Maj. Purdue
Layout and Design: Spc. Karla P. RodriguezMaciel, 14th PAD
Editor: Staff Sgt. Mark Albright, 14th Public Affairs Detachment

Contact the *Iron Strong* at VOIP: 242-1190, DSN: 318-849-0089 or email mark.albright@iraq.centcom.mil

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Platoon Sergeant, Staff Sgt. Ronis Gutierrez, with Charlie Battery, Fires squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment tries qualifying at the rifle range during the Dragoon Warrior Competition, at Forward Operating Base Warhorse located in the Diyala Province, Iraq. The competing Soldiers are required to fire in three different positions; prone supported, prone un-supported and the kneeling position.

Competition from Page 1

Improvised Explosive Device.

This situation can be a reality and is the environment in which the Army trains its Soldiers.

A competition for bragging rights brought out some of 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment's best of the best to showcase the training they received while deployed, during the Dragoon Warrior Competition at Forward Operating Base Warhorse located in the Diyala Province, Iraq.

Two-man teams were selected to represent each squadron at FOB Warhorse. "Each squadron was told to identify one non-commissioned officer and one lower enlisted Soldier to represent their unit in this competition," said 2SCR regimental Command Sgt. Major Victor Martinez.

"Some squadrons chose to do boards, unit competitions and evaluations, to select their top Soldiers," Martinez said. "The Soldiers involved will have to evaluate a casualty, qualify at the range, clear a house born improvised explosive device and a number of weapons tasks, just to name a few things."

In the past, most jobs in the Army consisted of field artillery, infantry or scouts. The new generation of Army has a healthy mix of Soldiers who work in many specialties.

The same applies to the competitors for the Dragoon Warrior.

"There is a mix of medics, comm, infantry and supply Soldiers. They have no idea what to really expect," said Martinez. "You don't know if you'll get hit by an Improvised Explosive Device or if you're going to get shot at. The intent is to recreate what one might expect going outside the wire. There is no telling what could happen."

"The Dragoon Warrior Competition is very physical," Martinez stated. "These guys will be running all over the FOB to different locations. Each task is used to test the training knowledge these Soldiers have gained during this deployment. The faster that they get the tasks done the more points each team gets," Martinez added.

Bragging rights for being the best can be a motivational

booster for the competitors. "We all know Fires squadron is the best," said Spc. Joseph Santoro, Company A, 5th Squadron, 2nd SCR.

"This competition is good for morale," Santoro continued. "Each of us is rooting for our own unit to do well because we like a little competition. Some of the guys are coming here and looking real tired but they continue to press on because they want to be known as the best."

Being known as the best and earning the title "Dragoon Warrior" is not for everyone though. "I've never competed in one of these competitions but I've been through plenty of boards to know that it can be tough," said Staff Sgt. Kyle Stallings, Alpha Fires squad leader, 5th Squadron, 2nd SCR.

"Having NCO's dually involved in the competition is a great way to build esprit de corps within the unit as well. If a lower enlisted Soldier sees me going through each task with him, he can be confident that as an NCO I lead from the front. And eventually he will continue the cycle when he becomes an NCO, knowing that his leadership is willing and able to do the same," Stallings added.

Some of the events required during the competition are for one Soldier to act and the other to supervise. For example, evaluating a casualty requires one Soldier to perform first aid techniques on their teammate by giving them an IV.

At another station, the competitors practice their memorization skills while being put under intense stress. After which, the two Soldiers are required to then clear a house, laced with IED, an irate hostage and several booby traps throughout the house.

"The rifle qualification range is a big part of the competition too," Stallings said. "The Soldiers are required to fire in three different positions; prone supported, prone un-supported and the kneeling position. All of the events are timed which adds stress to the already stressful environment."

All of these tasks test the skills Soldiers use on a daily basis while deployed.

Each Soldier competing in the competition, hand selected by their individual squadron's to showcase who the best really is; ready, willing and able to bring on the competition. But there can only be one true "Dragoon Warrior."



Staff Sgt. Christopher Coyle, a squad leader with 1st Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, sits before a board of sergeant's majors, answering questions that test his military knowledge. The board was just one of several tasks to complete as part of the Dragoon Warrior Competition at Forward Operating Base Warhorse located in the Diyala Province, Iraq.

SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER

NO ONE STANDS ALONE

Prevention of suicide should be everybody's concern. Suicide is a preventable tragedy for Service Members, Family, Civilians and the Military Community.

WHY DOES ANYONE THINK ABOUT SUICIDE?

Causes of suicidal feelings...

- Problems with personal relationships, especially divorce, cheating or keeping secrets.
- Overwhelming combat stress.
- Legal, financial or UCMJ problems.
- Death of a friend, spouse, child or other family member.
- People lose their sense of worth.
- Problems build up and it seems like there is nowhere to go for help.
- Depression or other medical problems are not treated.

People say to themselves...

- "My marriage is a failure...I'm a failure."
- "I just can't seem to do anything right. There is no way that I'm going to fix this."
- "I am in so much trouble that my life is over."
- "There's no way I can live my life without that person."
- "No one really cares if I'm here or not."
- "I don't care about myself or anyone else."
- "Nothing feels right; I don't understand what is happening. There is no hope of anything getting better."

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS FOR SUICIDE?

Someone has a "fatal attitude..."

- Saying that they hate – or don't care about – themselves, their spouse or family.
- Talking or hinting about suicide or a desire to die.
- Suddenly finalizing personal affairs, paying off debts or talking about "what you should do if I'm gone."
- Giving large gifts or giving away personal items.
- Making a suicide plan or arranging to be alone for no good reason.
- Obsession with depressing music, poetry or artwork.

Noticeable changes in behavior...

- Avoiding normal hobbies, fun activities or daily routines.
- Big increases or decreases in appetite.
- Wanting to spend a lot of time alone.
- Refusal to talk/email with friends, family or loved ones.
- Strange emotional outbursts.
- Failure to maintain uniform standards, hygiene or PMCS of personal equipment.
- Drop in duty performance or apparent skill level.
- Unusually dangerous, foolish or risky behavior, as if they don't care about their life.

IS THERE ANY WAY TO PREVENT SUICIDES?

Individuals...

- Keep in mind the Army Values
 - *Selfless Service*: make the effort to help someone else.
 - *Integrity*: be honest about the problem.
 - *Personal Courage*: admit that you or someone else needs help.
- Talk to your buddies about your problems.
- Listen to your buddies' problems. Don't judge.
- Be worried about someone with a failing relationship.
- **Be blunt!** Ask "Are you thinking about suicide?"
- If someone is suicidal, NEVER LEAVE THEM ALONE, even for a "just a minute."
- Get help immediately. Don't try to solve the problem.

Leaders...

- Look for warning signs in anyone with relationship, financial or legal problems
- Learn about the Army's suicide prevention strategies.
- Empower NCOs and Officers to get help for themselves and their Soldiers.
- Coordinate training, counseling and treatment.
- Involve Soldiers, Families and civilians in teamwork to build resiliency and support systems.
- Implement a suicide prevention plan, including a unit watch program.
- Take advantage of Behavioral Health assets.

HOW CAN YOU PREVENT A SUICIDE?

Protect them...

- NEVER LEAVE THE PERSON ALONE.
- Take away their weapon or whatever they might use to harm themselves.
- Do not "try to talk them out of it." Listen and tell them that you understand.
- Tell them that you know their problems are real and that you want to help them.
- Talk to them about why they feel the way they do.
- **BE PROFESSIONAL!** Do not joke around or belittle someone for asking for help.

Get help...

- Take the person to the chaplain, medic, 1SG or commander immediately. Follow your Unit Watch SOP.
- If needed, send someone else to get help. Don't leave them alone.
- Arrange for medical evacuation with an escort if help is not available locally.
- After they return from treatment, ensure that they go to their follow-up appointments.
- Keep tabs on people who have had problems in the past.
- Make time for unit-level education and discussion.

Understanding suicide can prevent it.

Army Suicide Prevention Week, Sept. 7-13

CALIFORNIA

(AP) A teenager was arrested for investigation of four counts of murder Wednesday in the killings of a woman and three girls whose bodies were found in a burning house, authorities said.

Bail for Corey King was set at \$1 million, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Deputy Aura Sierra said.

Authorities had called King, 18, of Altadena, an associate or friend of the victims when he was brought in for questioning Tuesday. A telephone listing for King could not be immediately located.

Los Angeles County firefighters on Tuesday found the victims in different rooms of the burning house in Lancaster, a Mojave Desert city of about 145,000 residents about a 70-mile drive north of Los Angeles.

Coroner's officials on Wednesday identified the dead woman as Sonya Evette Durfield, 43, of Lancaster. The identities of the other three victims were not immediately confirmed because the bodies were badly burned, said Ed Winter, assistant chief of the coroner's office.

The victims had "trauma to the body" not associated with the fire, Winter said. He did not elaborate.

Gregory Kealikea Stewart identified himself as the estranged husband of the slain woman and said the young victims were his three daughters, ages 8, 12 and 14.

Stewart said he was in a "world of disarray." He received a cell phone call while standing in front of reporters outside the fire scene Tuesday and said, "Oh Lord, it's my wife."

Sheriff's Lt. Patrick Nelson said Wednesday that King was a "close friend" of the woman's 19-year-old son, who currently lives out of state. King appeared to have been a frequent visitor to the woman's home, Nelson said.

King is believed to have set the fire at the home, possibly to cover up the killings, Nelson said, adding that investigators did not know of a motive.

Evelyn Burrell, who identified herself as a friend of the slain woman, said she and King had been at the house the night before the killings, and he was still there when she left at 1:30 a.m.

She told the Antelope Valley Press that King was a friend of the woman's 18-year-old son, who did not live at the home. King had been drinking and was acting obnoxiously, she said. "She begged me not to go," Burrell said of the woman.

"I didn't know that she was in any danger. If I would have known, I would have stayed," Burrell said.

Nelson said he could not confirm the account that King had been drinking at the house.

After the killings, King is believed to

have taken the woman's car to a nearby Wal-Mart to shoplift clothing, Nelson said.

"We believe that that was probably in order to change clothes to try to disassociate himself from evidence," Nelson said.

After stealing some clothes he fled the store but apparently was unable to get back into the car, smashed a window but was unable to start the vehicle and fled, Nelson said.

Another quadruple homicide and fire took place in the same area in late June. A woman, her two children and another relative were found beaten and stabbed in their burned house. The woman's ex-husband and an alleged accomplice were arrested and charged with murder and arson.

Elsewhere, authorities in Irvington, N.J., entered a burning home Monday and found three people dead and a fourth fatally wounded, and they said the fire apparently was set to cover up a shooting. Two of the victims were teens who were shot in the head.



HEALTH

(Reuters) The AIDS virus is especially hard to fight because few people develop antibodies to neutralize it, but U.S. researchers said on Thursday they have found an immunity gene that may offer a new way to fight back.

They said the gene Apobec3 helps mice develop antibodies against an HIV-like virus, and they think the same gene in humans could lead to a potent vaccine against the human immunodeficiency virus or HIV.

"This gene is central to HIV biology," Dr. Warner Greene of the Gladstone Institutes at the University of California, San Francisco, said in a telephone interview.

So far, efforts to make a vaccine against HIV have failed.

In humans, HIV devotes one of its 9 genes to disabling Apobec3 proteins, which may help explain why people with HIV rarely make antibodies against the virus, he said.

HIV is a retrovirus, which means it copies bits of its own genetic code into the DNA of the host.

"If we could prevent HIV from destroying this key pivotal host factor, we might allow HIV-infected patients to develop neutralizing antibodies like they do in mice," he said.

"It's a translation from mice to men. That's the challenge now," said Greene, whose study appears in the journal *Science*.

Green's lab and others have been hunting for the gene in mice that allows them to fight off the Friend virus, a retrovirus similar to HIV.

Working with a team at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the researchers conducted a series of experiments in which they genetically engineered mice to lack the Apobec3 gene. "Sure enough, when we knocked out the Apobec3 gene, they lost their ability to recover from Friend virus infection," Greene said.

He said the discovery of Apobec3's role in retroviral immunity is exciting because genes in this region are active in people who resist HIV infection, suggesting they are making effective antibodies against the virus.

"Blocking this degradation of Apobec3 is probably the most promising new drug target in HIV biology," Greene said.

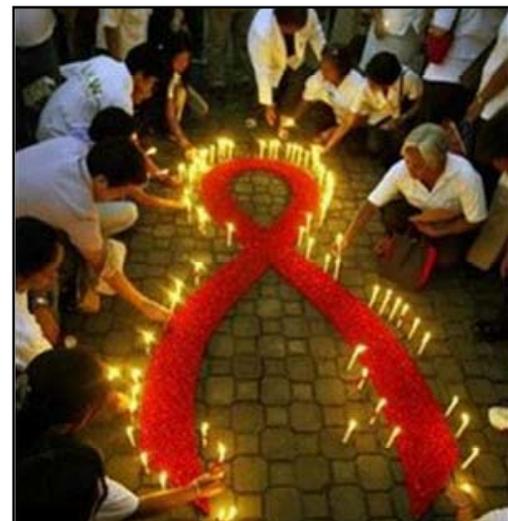
Antibodies are key to warding off viral infections, and most vaccines against viral diseases stimulate the body to make antibodies against the target virus.

Greene said efforts at developing an HIV vaccine have largely focused on building up a kind of immune cell called a T-cell to attack the virus.

"Those types of approaches are not proving adequate. We are desperately seeking better approaches to creating neutralizing antibodies," he said, adding, "Maybe this will help us."

The AIDS virus infects an estimated 33 million people globally and has killed about 25 million since the pandemic started in the 1980s.

There is no cure but drugs can suppress the virus and allow patients to lead a near-normal life. Without treatment, the virus destroys the immune system, leaving patients susceptible to infections and cancer.



TENNIS

(AFP) - Top seed Daniela Hantuchova launched her quest for a first career WTA title at the Bali Open on Wednesday with a 6-1, 7-5 victory over Ukrainian Olga Savchuk.

The 25-year-old Slovakian, currently ranked 11th in the world, is hoping to go one step further than she did here last year, when she lost in the final to former number one Lindsay Davenport, who was launching her comeback.

Hantuchova won the first set easily against the 121st-ranked Savchuk, but was tested in the second as the underdog mounted a spirited fight in the tropical heat.

Savchuk broke Hantuchova with a passing shot winner for a 4-2 lead, but the Slovakian broke back in the following game, and sealed the victory on her second match point.

"She picked up her level the second set," said Hantuchova. "She was more aggressive on serve and it was tough to break here. I made one mistake and she broke me.

"But I broke right back, I'm pleased for that. I just kept fighting for every point. It was a good test for me, I handled the big points well."

Hantuchova is trying to salvage her 2008

season after suffering a stress fracture in her right heel two months before Wimbledon.

"It's getting there," she said of her conditioning. "I'm working as hard as I can. I understand it's a long way back and it's not 100 percent yet.

"I have to keep going, play a lot of practice sets and hopefully soon I will be back."

Her win on Wednesday was only her fourth since the start of the grass-court season, and comes after a first-round loss at the US Open against German Anna-Lena Groenefeld.

Poland's Marta Domachowska booked a quarter-final place with a win over US veteran Jill Craybas 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-4.

Later in the day, second-seeded Patty Schnyder and number five Francesca Schiavone also followed the form-book with victories.

Schnyder, a US Open quarter-finalist, stopped Yuan Meng of China 6-2, 7-5, but only after stalling on match point when a passing shower delayed the end by nearly an hour.

"I still have to find my rhythm," said the Swiss. "After a big tournament like the US Open, it's difficult to put your mind into a new one so fast."

Schiavone, one of four Italians in the field, dismissed Akgul Amanmuradova of Uzbekistan 6-3, 6-2.



BASEBALL

(AP) Carlos Pena hit a three-run homer in the 14th inning, then Tampa Bay reliever Jason Hammel escaped a major jam Wednesday night to give the AL East-leading Rays a 4-2 win over the Boston Red Sox.

After playing more than five hours, the Rays increased their division edge to 2 1/2 games over the Red Sox. Boston's wild-card lead was cut to five games by Minnesota.

Tampa Bay was only 1-for-35 with runners in scoring position in this series before Pena homered.

Boston loaded the bases with no outs in the 14th against closer Troy Percival. Hammel took over with a 4-1 lead and retired three straight batters for his first save since he pitched at Class A Hudson Valley in 2002.

The Rays, who led the division by 5 1/2 games last week, won the final two matchups at Fenway Park. Tampa Bay had its lead sliced to one-half game with its 3-0 loss to Boston on Monday.

The teams meet again next week for three games at Tropicana Field, where the Rays are 6-0 against the Red Sox.



Tampa Bay had managed only one hit with runners in scoring position during this set — Dioner Navarro delivered a go-ahead double against Jonathan Papelbon in the ninth inning of Tuesday's 5-4 comeback win — before Pena hit Mike Timlin's pitch into the Green Monster seats.

Timlin (4-4) tied Kent Tekulve for the most appearances by a right-handed reliever with 1,050. Akinori Iwamura and Rocco Baldelli singled with two outs before Pena hit his 28th homer.

Trevor Miller (2-0) pitched one hitless inning.

After the Red Sox loaded the bases, Percival was pulled with an apparent injury. Kevin Youkilis' sacrifice fly made it 4-2 before Jason Bay struck out and Alex Cora flied out.

The Red Sox had runners on first and second in the ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th, but did not score.

Josh Beckett, making his second start after being sidelined for nearly three weeks with an inflamed right elbow, gave up one run and six hits in six innings.

In the 12th, Dustin Pedroia was hit by a pitch leading off and David Ortiz, trying to bunt for a hit against an overshifted infield, wound up with his first sacrifice since 2001.

Chad Bradford got Youkilis on a double-play grounder and Bay bounced to short in the 10th. Jacoby Ellsbury, hitless in six at-bats before a 14th inning double, flied out to end the 11th. He also ended the ninth, grounding out.

Rays starter Andy Sonnanstine allowed one unearned run, fanned seven and didn't walk anyone in seven innings.

Willy Aybar's RBI triple over the head of right fielder Mark Kotsay moved the Rays ahead 1-0 in the second after Cliff Floyd reached on bad-hop infield hit.

Boston tied it 1-all on Pedroia's two-out RBI double in the third. Sonnanstine should have been out of the inning, but Iwamura dropped a throw to second on a play that would have been a forceout.

FOOTBALL

WEEK ONE

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2008

FINAL	1	2	3	4	SCORE
WASHINGTON	0	7	0	0	7
NY GIANTS<<	10	6	0	0	16

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2008

FINAL	1	2	3	4	SCORE
DETROIT	0	14	7	0	21
ATLANTA<<	21	0	10	3	34
CINCINNATI	0	3	0	7	10
BALTIMORE<<	7	3	7	0	17
SEATTLE	0	7	3	0	10
BUFFALO<<	7	13	14	0	34
NY JETS<<	7	6	7	0	20
MIAMI	0	7	0	7	14
KANSAS CITY	0	3	0	7	10
NEW ENGLAND<<	0	7	7	3	17
TAMPA BAY	7	3	3	7	20
NEW ORLEANS<<	7	0	10	7	24
ST. LOUIS	0	0	0	3	3
PHILADELPHIA<<	14	7	10	7	38
HOUSTON	0	3	0	14	17
PITTSBURGH<<	7	14	14	3	38
JACKSONVILLE	0	7	0	3	10
TENNESSEE<<	3	7	0	7	17
DALLAS<<	7	14	7	0	28
CLEVELAND	0	7	0	3	10
CAROLINA<<	0	9	7	10	26
SAN DIEGO	0	7	3	14	24
ARIZONA<<	3	7	10	3	23
SAN FRANCISCO	7	3	0	3	13
CHICAGO<<	7	8	7	7	29
INDIANAPOLIS	3	3	7	0	13

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2008

MINNESOTA	0	3	3	13	19
GREEN BAY<<	0	10	7	7	24
DENVER<<	7	10	10	14	41
OAKLAND	0	0	0	14	14

BANGLADESH

(AFP) Emergency authorities in Bangladesh on Thursday released former prime minister Khaleda Zia as part of efforts to restore democracy in the South Asian country by the end of the year.

Zia, 63, walked out of jail after spending just over a year locked up over alleged corruption dating back to her two stints as premier from 1991-1996 and 2001-2006, her lawyer said.

Her release on bail comes as the army-backed government seeks to relinquish power and hold elections in late December.

The participation of Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is seen as crucial for the success of the polls, which will bring an end to nearly two years of emergency rule.

Lawyer Ahmed Azam Khan said Zia was allowed to leave the prison where she had been held since September 3 last year at about 11:30 am local time (0530 GMT).

"She has been released from the jail," Khan told AFP.

He said Zia had gone directly to the grave of her husband, slain president Ziaur Rahman, before heading to the hospital where her ailing son Tareque Rahman -- also accused of graft and bailed last week -- is being treated.

Rahman has been issued a British visa and could fly to London for treatment for a spinal injury as early as Thursday evening, another lawyer Nadir Uddin Amir said.

Thousands of supporters gathered outside the prison, the cemetery and hospital awaiting Zia's arrival, police said.

The government also wants Zia to travel abroad for medical treatment for her arthritic knee but she does not want to leave.

Although the army-backed government wants Bangladesh's major parties to play a role in the polls, observers say it clearly wants to push Zia out and prevent the two-time premier from returning to office.

Zia and her arch-rival, fellow ex-premier Sheikh Hasina Wajed of the Awami League party, are both blamed for rampant corruption and Bangladesh's political meltdown that prompted the declaration of a state of emergency in January 2007.

That crisis saw the Awami League accuse the BNP of trying to rig elections, and weeks of strikes and violent protests brought the country -- one of the poorest on the planet -- to a standstill, prompting the army's intervention.

Since then, the emergency government has embarked on a major effort to clean up



Bangladesh's notoriously dysfunctional political system.

Authorities have detained around 150 senior politicians in a corruption crackdown, and a new voter list has also been compiled.

Zia's rival Sheikh Hasina was freed by the government in June and is currently in the United States in what is seen as a form of exile.

VENEZUELA

(AP) Two Russian strategic bombers landed in Venezuela on Wednesday as part of military maneuvers, President Hugo Chavez said, welcoming the unprecedented deployment at a time of increasing tensions between Moscow and the U.S.

The Venezuelan leader said the two Russian Tu-160 bombers will conduct maneuvers and that he hopes to "fly one of those things" himself.

Russian military analysts said it was the first time Russian strategic bombers have landed in the Western Hemisphere since the Cold War. The provocative foray into Venezuela was certain to add to the strain in U.S.-Russian relations created over Russia's war in Georgia.

Chavez called the deployment part of a move toward a "pluri-polar world" — a reference to moving away from U.S. dominance. "The Yankee hegemony is finished," Chavez said in a televised speech.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the bombers flew to Venezuela on a training mission and would conduct

training flights over neutral waters in the next few days before returning to Russia, according to a statement carried by Russian news wires.

Ministry spokesman Alexander Drobyshesky refused to say how long the deployment would last or whether the planes were carrying any weapons. Military officers in the past have said Russian strategic bombers do not carry live weapons on patrol flights.

NATO fighters escorted the two Russian bombers on their 13-hour trip to Venezuela over the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, the Defense Ministry said.

The Russian deployment appeared to be a tit-for-tat response to the U.S. move to send warships to deliver aid to U.S.-allied Georgia after its war last month with Russia.

"This is a redux of Cold War games, and a dangerous thing to do," said Moscow-based military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer. "It will only strengthen the hand of those in the United States who want to punish Russia for its action in Georgia."

Earlier this week, Russia said it will send a naval squadron and long-range patrol planes to Venezuela in November for a joint military exercise in the Caribbean.

Alexander Kononov, head of the Moscow-based Institute for Strategic Assessment, said the deployment would lead to further deterioration in U.S.-Russia relations.

"It's a demonstration of Russia's ability to do things nasty: You send warships to the Black Sea and we send bombers next to your door," Kononov said. "It will have a negative impact on global stability."

Meanwhile, NATO said Wednesday it had ended a routine exercise by four naval ships in the Black Sea. Russia had denounced the exercise as part of a Western military buildup sparked by the Georgia conflict.

The alliance said the four ships — U.S. frigate USS Taylor and three similar vessels from Spain, Germany and Poland — were moving back to the Mediterranean Sea after the 18-day mission.

Chavez has strongly backed Russia's stance in Georgia. He denied that Russia's plan for a deployment later this year is related, saying the Russian navy's visit

has been planned for more than a year.

Venezuela remains a leading oil supplier to the United States, but as tensions with Washington have grown, Chavez's government has spent billions of dollars on Russian weapons including helicopters, Kalashnikov rifles and Sukhoi fighter jets.

Chavez said Wednesday that Venezuela is looking to buy Russian submarines and is working with Russia to set up an air-defense system including long-range radar and "rockets ready to defend the country."

He also announced the country will soon buy 24 Chinese-made K-8 flight training and light attack aircraft. The socialist leader, who survived a failed 2002 coup he blames on Washington, repeated his accusations of U.S.-backed attempts to kill him or topple him, saying U.S. forces are "looking for active soldiers, looking for pilots to bomb Miraflores," the presidential palace.

The U.S. Embassy denied it.

"The United States continuously strives for positive and productive relations with Venezuela," Embassy spokeswoman Robin Holzhauer said. "Unfortunately, the Venezuelan government often responds to these open overtures with name-calling and storytelling. These Venezuelan actions are unfortunate for both of our countries."

Chavez has called the U.S. Navy's newly re-established Fourth Fleet a threat. On Wednesday, he said he's sure "nuclear submarines pass under our noses" off Venezuela's coast. He said Venezuela is aiming to strengthen its "defensive capability with our strategic allies, and Russia is one of them."

Later, Chavez called the U.S. the "empire" as he addressed troops at the christening of a new coast guard patrol ship. "Every day, relations between Venezuela and Russia will continue to deepen."

He dismissed comparisons to the Cold War, but mentioned Cuba while saying he had been reviewing flight theory in a simulator in hopes of flying one of the Russian planes.

Addressing his close friend Fidel Castro, Chavez said: "I'm going to fly a Tu-160. Fidel, I'm going to fly low past you there."

