

Basra governor gunned down at checkpoint

Kidnappers free Filipino hostage after Manila withdraws troops

REUTERS, BASRA

A member of the regional council of Basra, Iraq's second biggest city, was shot dead yesterday along with two bodyguards, a council spokesman said. Hazim Tawfiq al-Anachi was assassinated at a checkpoint in the southern Iraqi city, he said. Anachi was the latest in a string of Iraqi officials to be attacked. "At the checkpoint, there were some people wearing police uniforms who asked the driver to stop. Then they opened fire," he said, adding that another man in the car was wounded.

Militants have attacked or killed several senior Iraqi officials, who they accuse of collaborating with US-led forces in the country. A se-

nior Defense Ministry official was gunned down near his Baghdad home late Sunday. Last week, gunmen killed the governor of the northern province of Nineveh and two of his bodyguards as he drove in a convoy to Baghdad. A senior official from the Industry and Minerals Ministry was also shot dead in Baghdad. Saturday, the justice minister's convoy was attacked by a suicide car bomb. The minister escaped but five bodyguards were killed.

Relatives of a Filipino hostage freed in Iraq celebrated his release with cheers, tears and beers on Tuesday as the Philippine president defended her decision to yield to the demands of his kidnappers.

Angelo de la Cruz, a 46-year-old truck driver and father of eight who had been threatened with beheading, said his abductors had not hurt him during two weeks captivity that ended a day after a 51-member force of Filipino troops and police quit Iraq. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, breaking a public silence she maintained throughout the crisis, said she had no regrets for having pulled out the force one month ahead of schedule in order to save the life of a compatriot in peril. "A father of eight, Angelo has become a Filipino Everyman, a symbol of the hardworking Filipino seeking hope and opportunity," she said in a live broadcast announcing his release.



Philippine President Arroyo after hearing the news of the release of the prisoner / EPA



Directors of the Spanish Episcopal Conference / ARCHIVES

Spanish Bishops plead for MPs to vote against same-sex marriage bill

ALEXLEFF

Spanish bishops have made a request to Catholic members of parliament regarding the issue of same-sex marriages. Politicians have been asked to consider their faith when it comes time to vote for a law that could legalise same-sex marriages, and that as Catholics their vote should be a flat "No". Marriage between homosexuals, according to Spanish bishops, poses a threat to social order and will bring about "very negative consequences for the common good and the future of the society."

The bishopric request came in the form of a note called *In favour of holy*

matrimony, targeting a new bill that would bring courts to recognise the legal union of same-sex marriages. In it the Church states that they must remind MPs of "something as obvious and as natural" as the fact that marriage cannot be between any couple other than "persons of different sex". It characterised the government as acting "arbitrarily" if it were to legalise same-sex marriages, seeing as this is a "non-existent right".

In the bishops' opinion, their judgement is not discriminatory. They would consider it discrimination, however, if "a holy matrimony were to be treated the same as a same-sex union".

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