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40 Saudis Likely to Be Freed From Guantanamo Soon

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JEDDAH, 6 November 2005 — Forty Saudis are to be freed from the notorious US detention camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba soon as one Saudi and three Bahrainis returned home yesterday after being released from the detention facility. The news of the impending release was revealed by a Kuwaiti activist. Saudi and Bahraini authorities too promised to keep pressing Washington to free the remaining detainees.

“A group of Bahrainis and more than 40 Saudis will be sent back to their countries soon,” Khalid Al-Oudah, the head of the Society of Families of Kuwaiti Prisoners in Guantanamo, said citing “very reliable sources.” Five Kuwaitis released from Guantanamo arrived home Thursday leaving six Kuwaitis at the facility, including Oudah’s son.

Maj. Gen. Mansour Al-Turki, a spokesman of the Saudi Interior Ministry, said he had no information about the release of 40 prisoners. “I don’t have information on specific number of detainees who would be released but whenever someone is released we issue a statement immediately,” he told Arab News.

He said that Saudi Arabia hopes to receive the remaining Saudi detainees from Guantanamo or anywhere they might be held against their will. “There is no timetable for the release of these detainees but there are continued efforts as we witness periodical releases of prisoners,” he said.

Al-Turki yesterday announced the release of Majed Afas Radhi Al-Shammari from the US detention camp and his arrival in the Kingdom. “He will be interrogated by authorities here and then they will determine whether to hold him or release him,” he added.

Saudi Interior Ministry thanked US authorities for releasing Shammari. “We hope to receive the remaining Saudi detainees in the near future,” the ministry’s spokesman said.

A member of the Saudi detainees’ defense team in Riyadh, Kateb Al-Shammari, said he was not aware of the imminent release of any of the 120 Saudis still at Guantanamo.

Bahrain said with three of its citizens returning yesterday, only three Bahrainis remain at the camp including Jumah Al-Dossari who reportedly attempted suicide in mid-October.

Salman Ibrahim Al-Khalifa, Abdullah Al-Noaimi and Adel Kamil Abdullah Al-Haji returned yesterday aboard a US military plane from Guantanamo, according to Bahraini authorities. “The three have arrived and they are in their houses,” said Adel Al-Moawdah, the deputy speaker of Bahrain’s Parliament who has been pushing for their release and greeted one of them on arrival.

The three were arrested four years ago by Pakistani authorities and handed over to US forces during the 2001 war in Afghanistan. “It was an ordeal for them and their families. We have been working for their release since day one,” said Information Minister Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar.

About 200 well-wishers lined up to welcome one of the freed men, 40-year-old Al-Haji, at a public reception hall, in Muharraq, a suburb in the northeast of the capital Manama.

"It's nice to be home, but I will be happier once they release all my detained brothers," said a tired-looking but smiling Al-Haji

Al-Moawdah said the returnees were interviewed early yesterday by prosecution officials before being sent home. "I don't think they will be charged with anything," he said. "There is nothing to charge them with."

Abdul Ghaffar, who is also Bahrain's minister of state for foreign affairs, said local legal authorities will continue questioning the men to learn more about what they were doing in Pakistan before their capture. "We don't have solid information about what they were doing there but according to their families they were providing humanitarian relief like many people from the Gulf have done in Afghanistan and Pakistan," the minister said.

In Washington, attorneys asked a federal court on Friday to order an independent psychological evaluation of a detainee who attempted suicide last month. Al-Dosari, who has been held for nearly four years at Guantanamo, tried to hang himself Oct. 15 during a bathroom break while visiting with his lawyer, Joshua Colangelo-Bryan.