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Time for Justice

Editorial
Khaleej Times
August 12, 2005

The United States is holding negotiations with ten nations that could lead to transferring of nearly 80 per cent of the detainees — as many as 410 — held at the Guantanamo Bay prison to their home countries in the next few months. There are said to be 510 detainees belonging to 34 countries at the Bay. Citizens from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen account for the majority of the detainees — most of them captured in Afghanistan during the US invasion.

In recent months, US allies like Afghanistan have been urging Washington to transfer their nationals held at the Bay to their own custody. Afghanistan has already signed an agreement with the US that will pave the way for such a transfer. Whatever the motivations, the US move to transfer the detainees back to their home countries is of course most welcome.

The Guantanamo Bay detentions have been a constant source of concern for the human rights organisations and the Muslim world. Recent reports of abuse and military trials have only intensified the calls to release the detainees — some of them held for the past three years. US media and politicians cutting across political affiliations have been urging the US authorities to shut the prison or try those held at the Bay in US courts. Former president Jimmy Carter and many Republican and Democrat lawmakers are among those who have been pushing for closing down the camp.

This is why the Bush administration's move to resolve this issue by transferring the majority of detainees to their home countries and holding only those considered dangerous — "really bad guys", according to Bush — at the Bay is a positive development. It will go a long way in repairing considerable damage done to America's image around the world.

However, utmost care should be taken by all parties involved to ensure it does not end up as a classic case of getting out of the frying pan into the fire. The agreement the US is reportedly planning to sign with the countries before transferring the detainees to them should be strictly respected by all concerned. The Gitmo detainees mustn't disappear into yet another legal black hole after being transferred to their own countries. If they are guilty of acts of terror and there is credible evidence to back the charges, they should be tried in a proper court of law. If there's nothing to link them to terror acts, they should be allowed to go home. They have suffered long enough. They cannot languish in a legal limbo forever. It's time for justice.