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Report finds 34 'credible' civil rights complaints

By Curt Anderson
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Justice Department investigators found that 34 claims were credible of more than 1,000 civil rights and civil liberties complaints stemming from anti-terrorism efforts, including allegations of intimidation and false arrest.

According to a report Monday, Glenn A. Fine, the Justice Department's inspector general, looked into allegations made between Dec. 16, 2002, and June 15 under oversight provisions of the USA Patriot Act. Many complaints were from Muslims or people of Arab descent who claimed they were beaten or verbally abused while being detained.

Among these are a claim by a Muslim inmate that he was ordered to "remove his shirt so that the officer could use it to shine his shoes" and a complaint from an Egyptian national that he was improperly arrested by the FBI after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The report also substantiated a claim by a federal prison inmate who said he was told by a prison doctor, "If I was in charge, I would execute every one of you ... because of the crimes you all did." The doctor received a verbal reprimand from the Bureau of Prisons, the

report said.

In other cases, an immigration official allegedly held a loaded gun to the head of a detainee, while another was said to have "rudely" asked a person being detained if he "wanted to kill Christians and Jews."

The FBI was accused of illegally searching an Arab-American's apartment, vandalizing it and seizing property, later to return "to plant drugs in the complainant's home," the report says. A complaint from a naturalized citizen of Lebanese descent contends that the FBI and other federal agents raided his home searching for an AK-47 assault weapon based upon false information.

Most of the credible complaints remain under investigation, the report said. None of the individuals or locations involved was named in the report.

The Justice Department inspector general is required to monitor and issue regular reports on allegations of civil rights and civil liberties violations as part of the USA Patriot Act, a law Congress passed shortly after the terrorist attacks that broadened government powers of surveillance and investigative methods.

Justice Department spokesman Mark Corallo said Monday that the agency is "committed to pursuing every allega-

tion of civil liberties violations by federal law enforcement officers." But he added that the relatively small number of credible complaints makes it "pretty clear that this is not a huge problem."

But Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, said his latest report shows "there was a pattern of violating immigrants' rights" by the Justice Department after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

The latest report follows one by Fine in June that was highly critical of the department's detention of 762 people on immigration violations after the attacks. That report said some detainees were held for as long as eight months, sometimes mistreated and kept confined for 24 hours a day.

"Will the Justice Department ever admit that it has gone too far?" said Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, senior Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee.

Three previous complaints investigated by Fine's office were closed during the six-month time frame because the allegations could not be substantiated. These included an immigration detainee who said he was beaten and denied medical treatment and a prison inmate who said a guard slammed a food tray into his face, causing a nosebleed.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Power plant under scrutiny

HOUSTON (AP) — Federal officials plan a public meeting next week to discuss for the first time their review of tiny cracks in two instrumentation tubes which have kept one of the two power generating units at a nuclear plant near Bay City shut down.

Scott Burnell, spokesman for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, said the public meeting in Bay City next Monday will give the nuclear plant

a chance to explain to people what the problem was and how they have fixed it.

Officials at the South Texas Project nuclear plant said they have finished their repairs and have narrowed down the cause to two possibilities.

Representatives with the nuclear plant updated the NRC about what they think caused the cracks and the facility's long term monitoring and inspection plans during a meeting last week in Rockville, Md.

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