

## Iran to free British sailors as 'gift'

by UPI

LONDON - Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said Wednesday 15 British sailors and marines captured in the Persian Gulf last month will be freed.

Ahmadinejad made the announcement at a Tehran news conference, saying he had pardoned the 14 men and a woman for "trespassing" into Iranian waters on March 23.

"After our meeting they will go to the airport and be with their families," he said in the conference aired and translated on CNN.

Iran claims the group was in its waters while Britain claims they were in Iraqi waters working on a U.N. anti-smuggling mission.

Ahmadinejad said he was issuing the pardon as "a gift" to Britain, the BBC reported.

During the news conference, the president also pinned medals on the uniform of the coast guard commander who captured the Britons.

He also criticized the British government for deploying 26-year-old sailor Faye Turney. Ahmadinejad questioned British values for separating a mother from her child for military service, the report said.

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