

Millions in Iraq Mark Martyrdom Anniversary of 7th Shia Imam

BAGHDAD (Press TV) – Millions of Muslims have converged on the Iraqi capital Baghdad to mark the martyrdom anniversary of the 7th Shia Imam, Imam Musa ibn Jafar al-Kazim (PBUH). The ritual was commemorated on Sunday, the climax of a week-long pilgrimage where the faithful marched towards the Imam's shrine in the northern district of Kadhimiyah. The pilgrims were seen carrying a symbolic coffin of the Imam during the event.

One who repents for his thoughts and deeds will not be refused acceptance of the repentance.

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Iraqi Forces Liberate Largest Neighborhood in Western Mosul

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Iraqi security forces have pushed deeper into western Mosul, liberating the largest neighborhood in the area in a major blow to the Daesh terror group.

Lieutenant General Abdul Amir Yarallah, the commander of 'We Are Coming, Nineveh Operations,' said Iraqi forces have completely recaptured the neighborhood of al-Tanak from Daesh on Tuesday, al-Sumaria news website reported.

He added that Iraqi forces inflicted heavy losses on the terrorists during the operation.

To the east of Tanak, Iraqi armed forces have been facing tough resistance from Daesh in Mosul's Old City, an area stretching along the Tigris River, which divides Mosul into its eastern and western half.

The Old City's narrow alleys and densely-populated areas have made it hard for Iraqi troops to move forward.

Meanwhile, Iraqi group Popular Mobilization Units has delivered a counterblast to the Turkish president who had called the volunteer



A member of the Iraqi security forces loads a TOW anti-tank missile as troops advance towards Mosul's Old City on April 17, 2017, during an offensive to recapture the city from the Daesh terrorist group.

force fighting Daesh a "terrorist organization" and part of Iran's regional policy.

The group, known as Hashd al-Sha'abi by its Arabic name, has joined forces with the Iraqi government against Daesh terrorists.

Last November, the Iraqi Parliament approved a law, giving legal status to the fighters and recognizing them as part of the national

armed forces.

On Wednesday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan made incendiary remarks about the fighters in an interview with Doha-based Al Jazeera television channel, calling the group a terrorist organization.

The accusations prompted Hashd al-Sha'abi spokesman Ahmad al-Assadi to issue an angry riposte on Sunday, saying Erodgan had clearly

targeted the Arab country and its leadership.

Meanwhile, at least six Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces have reportedly been killed as Turkey resumes air raids on Kurdish positions in northern Iraq and in north-eastern Syria.

Kurdish sources said they were killed "by mistake" in a Turkish strike on a position held by the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) militants on the Sinjar Mountain in northern Iraq.

"Six people were martyred, five from the Peshmerga and the sixth from Asayish," the Kurdish security organization, said Lieutenant General Jabbar Yawar, secretary general of the Peshmerga ministry in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan government.

"Nine others were also wounded by the air strike on the Sinjar mountain," he added.

The deaths came hours after the Turkish army said in a statement that it had conducted airstrikes against PKK militants in an alleged bid to prevent the Kurdish forces from sending weapons to Turkey.

Committee: Palestinian Hunger Striker's Health Critically Worsening



A man holds a photo of prominent Palestinian prisoner Marwan Barghouti calling for his release during a rally supporting those detained in Israeli jails after hundreds of them launched a hunger strike in the occupied West Bank town of al-Khalil on April 17, 2017.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti's health conditions have been critically deteriorating during the past week after he joined a hunger strike with over a thousand other

Palestinian inmates in the Zionist regime's jails, a Palestinian committee says.

Head of the Palestinian Committee of Prisoners' Affairs Issa Qaraqe announced the news, adding

that Barghouti, 57, was suffering from a severe drop in blood pressure and blood sugar levels.

Since April 17, over 1,500 Palestinian prisoners from across the political spectrum have gone on a mass hunger strike, initially called for by Barghouti, in protest at the conditions of the occupying regime's prisons.

The Zionist regime has sentenced Barghouti, a top leader of the Palestinian Fatah Movement, to serve five life terms in prison over his role in the Palestinian Intifada (Uprising). The Israel Prison Service (IPS) has placed him in solitary confinement following the initiation of the strike eight days ago.

On last Wednesday, IPS spokesman Assaf Librati announced that Barghouti had been transferred from Hadarim Prison to the Kis-

hon Prison, near Haifa.

Head of the Palestinian Committee of Prisoners' Affairs Issa Qaraqe on Sunday denied the Zionist regime's media reports that some 88 prisoners had ended their strike.

The Zionist regime's prison authorities have raided prison sections, seizing personal belongings and banning the hunger strikers from praying and taking breaks in prison yards.

Israeli prisons hold around 6,500 Palestinians, including 300 minors. Some of the inmates are held under Tel Aviv's policy of administrative detention, which enables confinement without charge.

Palestinian inmates regularly stage hunger strikes in protest at the administrative detention policy and their harsh prison conditions.

Bomb Blast Hits Near Army Base in Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) – A car bomb explosion has hit an area near a military camp in Afghanistan's Khost Province, officials say.

A spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of the Interior said the car bomb was detonated near the Campaign military camp in Khost on Monday, Khaama Press reported.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The blast came on the same day that two of Afghanistan's highest-ranking officials in charge of security resigned over an earlier mili-

tant attack on an army base.

Afghanistan's defense minister and the country's army chief of staff resigned following the attack by the Taliban militants that took the lives of scores of Afghan army soldiers.

The Afghan presidential palace announced in a post on its Twitter account that President Ashraf Ghani had on Monday accepted the resignations of the defense minister and the army chief of staff.

"Defense Minister Abdullah

Habibi and Army Chief of Staff Qadam Shah Shahim stepped down with immediate effect," the presidential palace tweeted.

Shah Hussain Murtazawi, an acting spokesman for Ghani, separately told Reuters that the resignations were because of the Taliban attack on a military base in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, which killed some 140 army soldiers.

The base attacked was the headquarters of the Afghan National Army's 209th Corps, which is re-

sponsible for security in much of northern Afghanistan.

The scale of the loss of life and the apparent ease with which the Taliban militants managed to stage the attack have raised serious questions as to the state of security in Afghanistan, likely providing impetus for the Monday resignations.

The unrest comes as the U.S. has thousands of military forces in Afghanistan. It led an invasion of the country that toppled a Taliban regime in 2001.

Yemen's Week-Long 'March For Bread' Reaches Hudaydah



A Yemeni woman cooks in a make-shift shelter at a camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) on the outskirts of Sana'a on April 15, 2017.

SANAA (Dispatches) – Yemeni demonstrators have reached the western port city of Hudaydah following a week-long rally that started in the capital, Sana'a, in an attempt to draw the world's attention to the dire humanitarian situation in the country amid the Saudi aggression.

The demonstrators made the 225-kilometer walk, dubbed the "march for bread," to demand unrestricted aid deliveries to Yemen.

Waving flags emblazoned with loaves of bread, the protesters said Hudaydah should be declared a humanitarian zone and spared in the Saudi war on the impoverished country.

"The Hudaydah port has nothing to do with war... leave the port alone. The port is for our women, children, our old people," said protester Ali Mohammed Yahya.

Hudaydah is a major lifeline for imports into Yemen, a country that is 80-90 percent dependent on imported stuff for its survival.

Saudi Arabia has threatened to attack the port city and retake it from the Houthi Ansarullah movement.

Last week, the United Nations urged the Riyadh regime not to bomb Hudaydah and take humanitarian concerns into account.

Meanwhile, international aid agencies have demanded life-saving support to millions of civilians in Yemen, who are struggling to survive starvation and disease in the wake of Saudi Arabia's atrocious aerial bombardment campaign.

On Monday, Britain-based Oxfam urged donor nations to provide aid for the Yemeni people rather than arms for the aggressors.

"Many areas of Yemen are on the brink of famine, and the cause of such extreme starvation is political," it said in a statement on the eve of a United Nations conference in Geneva to seek aid pledges for the Arab country.

The British charity further argued that Western governments are participating in the confab "while they continue to sell billions of dollars worth of weapons and military equipment to parties to the conflict."

The food crisis could deteriorate in case the international community fails to send a clear message that Saudi-led airstrikes against Yemen's western port city of Hudaydah, which serves as a primary entry point for humanitarian aid and fuel for the Arab country, would be "totally unacceptable", Oxfam noted.

'Syria to Stop Counter-Terror Operations for Chemical Probe'

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – The Russian Defense Ministry says Syrian government forces will suspend counter-terrorism operations near a town in the northwestern province of Idlib to help experts carry out an investigation into a suspected chemical incident there.

"The General Command of the Syrian Army and Armed Forces has expressed readiness to cease operations in Khan Shaykhun if a special mission of experts is sent there to investigate the events of April 4," the ministry said in a statement.

On April 13, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov criticized Western countries, saying they were looking for excuses to avoid investigating both a recent suspected chemical attack in Syria's Idlib as well as U.S. missile strikes on an air base in the Arab country's Homs Province.

"We want the inspectors to transparently, independently and professionally investigate not only the [Shayrat] airfield that, as claimed by our Western colleagues, was used to load the aircraft with chemical weapons, but also to inspect the site hit by the airstrike. Only this kind of inspection can be objective," Lavrov said

in a joint press conference with his Bangladeshi counterpart, Abul Hassan Mahmud Ali, in Moscow.

Over 80 people died in the April 4 purported gas attack on Khan Shaykhun, which Western countries blamed on the Syrian government.

Using the incident as a pretext, U.S. warships fired 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles from two warships in the Mediterranean Sea at the Shayrat airfield in Syria's central province of Homs on April 7.

Meanwhile, Syrian military sources say Moscow has informed Damascus of its preparedness to dispatch ground troops to the Arab country to help Syrian government forces with battles against the foreign-sponsored terrorists.

The sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, revealed that the Russian special forces were ready to be deployed in the areas where Syrian troops were engaged in serious battles against the terrorist groups.

They further noted that the technical aspects of the plan had already been drawn up, and that it would be implemented once the Damascus government puts in an official request and Russian President Vladimir Putin issues the order.