

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) -- A "terrorist" was arrested after a huge explosion in Damascus on Sunday, Syrian state media has said, in a rare attack in the capital, which has been largely insulated from violence over the past year. State news agency SANA said that a "bomb blast" near a highway at the southern edge of the city had caused the explosion "without leaving any victims". "There is confirmation of reports that a terrorist has been arrested," it said. A UK-based activist group said that some people had been killed and injured in the blast.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri said on Sunday Iran seeks friendly relations with all neighbors, citing Hajj pilgrimage as an opportunity for increasing person-to-person interactions to promote ties with other countries. Speaking during the meeting of High Council of Hajj and Pilgrimage, Jahangiri said the annual Islamic event plays a key role in upgrading relations among Islamic nations. Hajj can play a constructive role in enhancement of relations among Islamic countries, he said.


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## Syria Repels Zionist Attack on Damascus Airport

BEIRUT/MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- Syrian military air defenses thwarted an attack by the occupying regime of Israel on Sunday, shooting down seven missiles targeting an airport in southeastern Damascus, Russia's National Defense Control Center was cited by RIA news agency as saying.

The attack, launched by four Israeli F-16 jets, did not damage the airport and there were no casualties, the control center was cited as saying.

"Our air defense systems thwarted ... an Israeli air aggression ... and prevented it from achieving any of its goals," a military source told state news agency SANA. It gave no further details.

The Zionist military later claimed that its Iron Dome interceptor system shot down a rocket fired at the northern part of the occupied Golan Heights on the Syria frontier.

The military's statement did not immediately specify where the rocket was launched from. The northern Golan is also close to Lebanese territory.

Zionist PM Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged an Israeli attack last week on what he called an Iranian arms cache in Syria.

He claimed that the occupying regime of had carried out "hundreds" of attacks over the past years of Syria's war to curtail Iran and its ally Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Netanyahu said Israeli forces would attack Iranians in Syria and warned them "to get out of there fast, because we will continue with our resolute policy".

Head of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Muhammad Ali Jafari dismissed Netanyahu's threats "a joke", and warned that the Zionist regime "was playing with a lion's tail."

"You should be afraid of the day that our precision-guided missiles roar and fall on your head," he said.

"Be sure, we do not take into account your ridiculous threats," the Iranian command-ed said. "You know that if we have chosen to wait against your hostile measures, some considerations lie behind it."

General Jafari also said that "the Islamic Republic of Iran will keep all its military and revolutionary advisers and its weapons in Syria."

"We will maintain all the military and revolutionary advisers as well as the equipment and weapons, which we have for training and empowering the Islamic resistance's warriors and for supporting the oppressed people of Syria, in that Islamic nation."

Iran and Russia have both backed Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in a seven-year war against terrorists and militants, with Tehran sending military advisors to the country.

Russia has warned Israel against carrying out airstrikes near the Damascus International Airport in the Syrian capital, London-based al-Quds al-Arabi newspaper reported on Friday, citing Russian sources.

Moscow said it would not tolerate further airstrikes in the area as it was seeking to renovate the airport and that the air raids were prompting airlines that wanted to resume Syria operations to reconsider their decision, the report said.

Observers view Zionist attacks as a bid to prop up Daesh and other takfiri terrorists who have suffered crushing defeat recently.

Last September, a Russian Il-20 reconnaissance aircraft with 15 servicemen on board was downed by Syria's S-200 missile launchers, which were at the time responding to Israeli strikes. Moscow held Israel responsible, saying the regime's pilots had intentionally used the Russian plane as cover to conduct air raids, effectively putting it in the crosshairs of the Syrian air defenses.

Russia stopped coordinating its airborne operations over Syria with the occupying regime after the incident, and upgraded Syria's defenses with its S-300 missile systems.

Zionist regional cooperation minister Tzachi Hanegbi boasted in October that Syria's acquisition of the equipment would not trouble Tel Aviv.

A day later, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Vershinin said Moscow hoped Israel would exercise "good judgment" on the delivery of the missile system to the Syrian government as it would be followed by "additional steps".

## West Silent on 'Barbaric' Treatment of Journalist



Protesters hold placards calling for the release of U.S.-born Press TV journalist Marziyeh Hashemi at a rally held outside the Swiss embassy in Tehran, Jan. 20, 2019.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Women staged a protest here on Sunday calling for the release of a Press TV journalist arrested in the United States.

The demonstrators waved pictures of Marziyeh Hashemi at the rally in front of the Swiss Embassy which handles U.S. interests in the Islamic republic.

U.S.-born Hashemi, who works for Iran's leading English-language channel, was held on arrival at St. Louis Lambert International Airport on January 13, according to family and friends cited by Press TV.

Hashemi, a Muslim convert who changed her name from Melanie Franklin, had reportedly been visiting her ill brother and other family members.

A U.S. court on Friday confirmed the arrest, saying her testimony is required over an unspecified case but that she is not accused of a crime.

At a hearing in Washington, a judge ordered the partial unsealing of an order on Hashemi.

It said that Hashemi was arrested on "a material arrest warrant" and would be let go after she gave testimony to a grand jury investigating unspecified "violations of U.S. criminal law".

The protesters in Tehran shouted slogans such as "We are all Marzieh" and carried posters with the hashtag #FreeMarziehHashemi.

"We demand that she is immediately released and returned to her family in full health," demonstrator Minaeepour told AFP.

Iran's Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif on Thursday described the detention as a "political action" by the United States that "tramples on freedom of speech" and demanded she be set free.

Zarif said that since Hashemi was married to an Iranian she is considered as an Iranian national and "it is our duty to defend our citizens".

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Ali Akbar Salehi told reporters Hashemi's detention has revealed the weakness of the U.S. government, which always claims to be a "beacon of democracy in the world".

"What kind of democracy is this that a woman who has traveled there to visit her family and is a hard-working journalist who has done nothing but reporting, is detained by them and nobody says anything," he added.

Salehi criticized the silence of Western countries, particularly the European Union, on the detention.

"When an issue is in line with their interests, Western countries raise hell, but when such unfortunate cases happen in which the innocence and truthfulness of this lady is evident to everybody, they remain totally silent."

Salehi stated the EU says a lot about the situation of human rights in Iran, so "why it has kept lull in this case?"

"Isn't she a journalist? She has been both a journalist and has family and is also a mother... What have they done? They say she has been detained as a witness, but is anybody sent to jail because of being a witness?" he added.

Hashemi's family has said the journalist had been treated like a criminal during her detention. U.S. authorities had handcuffed and shackled her, had her hijab forcibly removed, and photographed her without a headscarf.

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## Iran's Karrar Equals World's Best Tanks

TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Iran's latest model of its domestically-built Karrar tank puts it at the level of other world powers, officials have said.

In recent years Iran has built up an impressive list of new weapons systems, including ballistic missiles, and sought to improve its navy and air force.

According to Iran's Tasnim news agency, a tank dubbed the Karrar (striker) that was initially announced in 2017 is based on models going back to the 1970s. It was developed from the platform of a Russian T-72.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great headways in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in the arms sphere.

Iran's deputy Defense Minister General Qassem Taqizadeh discussed the latest version of the tank alongside a new Soumar cruise missile this month. The Karrar was destined to be delivered both to the army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

"The tank is at the level of the most advanced global tanks and can be compared to the Russian T-90 tank, even having superiority over it," former Defense Minister Hussein Dehqan was quoted in Shabestan news.

"It is a tank that, if we want to compare, is on the American Abrams scale."

The T-90 has been in service since the 1990s and the Abrams since the 1980s but both have received major upgrades since then.

Dehqan played a central role in developing the latest Karrar line of tanks that are built in the city of Dorud in Lorestan province.

The tank has an electro-optical fire control system, and the ability to fire at moving targets at night and in the day, as well as be able to shoot missiles with laser guidance. Like the T-90 its main gun is a 125mm cannon. The tank has armor effective against RPG-7s and similar ordinance.

So far Iran hopes to build 800 of the tanks to bolster its armed forces.

## As Europe Keeps Doors Shut: Up to 117 Migrants Feared Dead in Mediterranean

ROME (AP) -- Three survivors of a rubber dinghy that sank in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Libya say up to 117 other migrants were aboard at the time, a UN migration official said.

It appeared to be the latest tragedy on the dangerous central Mediterranean route from North Africa to Europe.

Flavio Di Giacomo of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) told Italian state TV that "unfortunately about 120" migrants were reported by survivors to have been on the overloaded smugglers' dinghy when it was launched from Libyan shores on Thursday evening.

"After a few hours, it began sinking and people began drowning," Di Giacomo said.

Among the missing are 10 women and two children, including a two-month-old baby, he said. Survivors indicated their fellow migrants came from Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Gambia and Sudan, Di Giacomo said.

Italian President Sergio Mattarella, who has urged that the government show more compassion for migrants, expressed his "deep sorrow for the tragedy that has taken place in the Mediterranean."

Premier Giuseppe Conte told reporters he was "shocked" at the reports of the sinking and vowed that Italy would continue to combat human traffickers.

Italy's populist government has banned private rescue boats from bringing migrants to Italian shores. Together with Malta, Italy has also launched probes of the rescue groups themselves, claiming their operations might facilitate trafficking.

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