

8 Killed, 17 Injured in Bomb Attack in Kabul

KABUL (Xinhua) – At least eight people, including an assailant, were killed and 17 others wounded after a bomb exploded near a government ministry office in western Kabul on Sunday, authorities said. “The preliminary findings show that seven civilians and the bomber were killed on the spot and 17 people injured in the blast which occurred at around 4:30 p.m. local time,” a security source told Xinhua near the scene. “A terrorist detonated his explosive belt near the building of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in Dar-ul-Aman locality, Police District 6 of the city,” Hashmat Stanikzai, spokesman of Kabul police, tweeted earlier.

Thought for Today

Though Allah knows them better than even they know themselves, yet those trials and tests are for the purpose of their realizing and knowing those deeds which merit reward or which deserve punishment. There are some people who love to have male children and hate daughters and there are some who simply crave for wealth and hate poverty.

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VOL NO: LV 10651 TEHRAN / Est.1959

Monday, July 16, 2018, Tir 25, 1397, Zil-Qa'dah 2, 1439

Hamas:

Anti-Zionist Demos to Go On Until Demands Met



A protester holds a Palestinian flag on top of tires to be burned during an ongoing protest next to Gaza's border, east of Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, Tuesday, April 3, 2018.

GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) – The Palestinian Islamic resistance movement, Hamas, says anti-occupation protests in the Gaza Strip will continue despite the Zionist regime's aggression against the besieged enclave.

Head of Hamas Political Bureau Ismail Haniyeh said on Sunday that demonstrations would go on until the fulfillment of the Palestinian people's demands, including their right to return to their homeland. He added that the illegal settle-

ment constructions and forced evacuations would fail to make Palestinians back down.

The senior Hamas leader said the Palestinian people would never change their stance on al-Quds, reiterating that the city and all other occupied territories belong to Palestinians.

Haniyeh's remarks came a day after a United Nations aid agency official said Palestinians in the Gaza Strip "have nothing to lose" as a ceasefire between the Zionist re-

gime and the Palestinian resistance groups, following the regime's heavy bombardment of the territory and Hamas's retaliatory rocket fire a day earlier.

"There is no tomorrow in Gaza, it's a big prison, there are no dreams, there is no stability. Two million people, 50 percent unemployment, the private sector doesn't work," he said in an interview with Ynet, the online arm of Israeli paper Yedioth Ahronot on Saturday.

Tel Aviv has most recently ratcheted up its attacks against Gaza, taking it under dozens of airstrikes, while claiming that it is responding to rocket fire from the territory.

Also on Saturday, it was reported that the regime and Gaza-based resistance groups had reached a "ceasefire agreement." Only hours afterwards, however, the regime resumed its attacks again alleging that it had come under renewed rocket strikes.

In a latest development, at least two Palestinians sustained injuries when Zionist fighter jets launched an airstrike against a residential area in the northern part of the Gaza Strip as the Tel Aviv regime continues with its acts of aggression against the impoverished coastal sliver.

Local sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Arabic-language Ma'an news agency that the warplanes had attacked a site allegedly used for releasing incendiary kites and balloons into occupied territories.

The development came less than a day after Hamas said it had reached a ceasefire with the regime after a wave of Zionist airstrikes on the Gaza Strip, and dozens of rockets fired from the Palestinian enclave in response.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said the Palestinian resistance movement had agreed to an "Egyptian offer to return to a ceasefire to stop this escalation."

UN:

Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan at Record High



Afghan officials carry the dead body of a victim at the site of a suicide bomb attack near a mosque in Kabul on March 9.

KABUL (Dispatches) – The number of civilians killed in Afghanistan reached a record in the first half of the year, despite last month's ceasefire, with a surge in attacks claimed by the Daesh terrorists group, the United Nations said on Sunday.

Deaths rose 1 percent to 1,692, although injuries dropped 5 percent to 3,430, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan said in its latest civilian casualty report. Overall civilian casualties were down 3 percent.

Hopes that peace may one day be agreed in Afghanistan were raised last month by a three-day truce over the Eid al-Fitr holiday which saw unprecedented scenes of Taliban fighters mingling with security forces in Kabul and other cities.

"The brief ceasefire demonstrated that the fighting can be stopped and that Afghan civilians no longer need to bear the brunt of the war," Tadamichi Yamamoto, the senior UN official in Afghanistan said in a statement.

But with heavy fighting seen across the country during the first half of the year and repeated attacks in Kabul and major provincial cities like Jalalabad, the report underlines the dire security situation facing Afghanistan.

It also pointed to increased activity by Daesh, reflected in a doubling in casualties in Nangarhar, the eastern province whose capital is Jalalabad, where the terrorist group has conducted a series of attacks over recent months.

Daesh has also taken advantage of the ongoing chaos in Afghanistan to establish a foothold in the country and recruited some of its members from among Taliban defectors.

Dozens of Taliban militants killed in Kunduz

Meanwhile, Afghan government forces killed at least 36 members of the Taliban militant group in the country's northern province of Kunduz on Saturday evening.

Abdul Baqi Noristani, the provincial police chief, said the militants were killed during Afghan security forces' airstrikes and ground operations in Chardara district of Kunduz, adding that at least ten other militants were also wounded.

The Kunduz police chief said several Taliban hideouts were targeted and the militants suffered heavy casualties during the Afghan airstrikes.

Noristani did not offer details about potential casualties among Afghan civilians or security forces.

Thousands Protest Zionist Regime's 'Racist' Nation-State Draft Law

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Some 7,000 people have taken to the streets of Tel Aviv to protest against a controversial bill that declares the Israeli-occupied territories exclusively "the nation-state of the Jewish people."

Several Israeli politicians, social activists, public figures and lawmakers took part in the demonstration to condemn the discriminatory nature of the measure.

The bill is expected to come to a final vote at the Israeli parliament (Knesset) on Monday. If passed, it could become part of the regime's basic laws that serve as a de facto constitution.

The draft law prioritizes Jewish values over democratic ones in the occupied territories, declares al-

Quds the "capital" of the Zionist regime, allows Jewish-only communities, sets Hebrew as the official language of the occupied territories and relegates Arabic from an official language to one with "special status."

In a joint statement, the participating organizations said, "The nation-state law would turn racism, discrimination and segregation into an inescapable part of our lives."

Addressing the protest, Israeli lawmaker Ayman Odeh, who chairs the predominantly Arab Joint List party, said the bill is meant "to stick a finger in the eyes of a fifth of Israel's population, spark a dispute and polarize in order to make a political gain for the

Netanyahu tyranny."

Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly said that the passage of the law is one of his top priorities. He hopes to get the bill approved before the parliament begins its summer recess on July 22.

"The nation-state bill won't make us disappear, but it will massively harm democracy. The large protest was an important step in the fight against fascism," Odeh said.

Under a Zionist regime that "has lost all shame, that fears its own shadow, the majority tramples the minority, legislation is racist and the democratic space is under constant threat," he added.

Lawmaker Tamar Zandberg, who heads Merez party, accused the

Israeli regime of pushing for the passage of law in a bid to distract people from the dire situation in the blockaded Gaza Strip.

Rabbi Gilad Kariv, CEO of the Reform Movement in Israel, described the draft law as "contemptible."

"The real score we need to settle is with those elected by the public (members of Knesset) who know deep inside how much the nation-state bill is going to tarnish the Israeli law book, and remain silent nonetheless," he said.

A group of 14 American Jewish organizations have also expressed their concerns about the contentious bill in a letter addressed to Knesset opposition leader Isaac Herzog.

Turkey Issues Presidential Decrees Reshaping Institutions

ANKARA (Reuters) – Turkey issued presidential decrees on Sunday reshaping key political, military and bureaucratic institutions as part of the transformation to a powerful executive presidency triggered by last month's election.

President Tayyip Erdogan was sworn in on Monday under the new system and now holds sweeping powers, allowing him to issue decrees on executive matters and appoint and remove senior civil servants.

Erdogan has said the powerful executive presidency is vital to make the government more efficient, drive economic growth and ensure se-

curity. Critics decry what they say is increasing authoritarianism and a push towards one-man rule.

Among the latest changes, the General Staff was brought under the authority of the defense minister, according to state-run Anadolu news agency, a move following Erdogan's appointment of military commander Hulusi Akar as defence minister.

In total, the country's Official Gazette published seven decrees affecting many state institutions, including the secretariat of the National Security Council, the Defense Industry Direc-

torate and the State Supervisory Council.

The changes coincide with the second anniversary of an attempted coup during which at least 250 people were killed, many of them unarmed civilians, when rogue soldiers attempted to topple Erdogan's government.

A state of emergency was imposed after the failed putsch on July 15, 2016 and is set to expire this week.

Erdogan's AK Party and its nationalist ally plan to introduce security regulations to ensure the "fight against terrorism" will continue after emergency rule ends, two sources told Reuters.

Activists Detail Saudi Arabia's Arrest of Outspoken Scholar

RIYADH (Press TV) – New details have emerged in the case of Saudi Arabia's arrest of an outspoken religious scholar, with activists taking to social media to share information about how the story unfolded.

Sheikh Safar al-Hawali, known for his chronic opposition to some of the kingdom's policies and the presence of American troops on Saudi soil, was arrested on Thursday amid Riyadh's ongoing crackdown on political and religious dissent.

A Twitter account under the name "Prisoners of Conscience" has now released some information about the 68-year-old's detention.

It says the authorities had ordered his arrest despite having full knowledge of his frail health condition, adding that the scholar had earlier suffered brain hemorrhage and had not yet fully recovered.

In addition to the preacher himself, three of his sons as well as his brother were also arrested. Al-Hawali was taken to Riyadh, while

his sons were transferred to the port city of Jeddah, the account revealed, noting that his brother was arrested in a "barbaric" manner and that his whereabouts remain unknown.

The Middle East Monitor website, meanwhile, has reported that al-Hawali was arrested following the publication of a book attributed to him, which is critical of the kingdom's "rapprochement" towards the US, its siege of Qatar, and "internal differences" among members of the ruling Al Saud family.

Since last year, the kingdom has gone on an arrest spree of oppositionists and human rights activists, accusing them of destabilizing efforts and endangering national security.

Last November, hundreds of influential Saudi businessmen and members of the royal family were also rounded up in an alleged "anti-corruption campaign" spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.