

Bahraini Refugee Footballer Begins Open-Ended Hunger Strike in Thailand

MANAMA (Press TV) – Bahraini footballer Hakeem Ali al-Araibi has launched an open-ended hunger strike in protest against an “unfair decision by a Thai court to arrest” him and prevent him from returning to his place of residence in Australia.

The chairman of the [Persian] Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, Yahya al-Hadid, in a post published on his official Twitter page, announced that Araibi had been transferred to prison.

Araibi was detained upon arriving in Thailand last week, and now faces deportation to Bahrain where he is at risk of persecution and torture.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has called on Bangkok to recognize the refugee status of the 25-year-old footballer and let him return to Australia.

Brad Adams, the executive director of the Asian division of HRW, pointed to the “grave

dangers” that Araibi faced if he was returned to Manama.

Araibi is wanted in Bahrain over his alleged involvement in attacking a police station for which he received a 10-year prison sentence in absentia.

The footballer says the charges against him are fabricated and that he was in Qatar at the time of the purported incident.

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the country in mid-February 2011.

They are demanding that the Al Khalifah regime relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established.

Manama has gone to great lengths to clamp down on any sign of dissent. On March 14, 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were deployed to



Bahraini footballer Hakeem Ali al-Araibi is seen in this file photo.

assist Bahrain in its crackdown.

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the Al Khalifah regime’s crackdown.

On March 5, 2017, Bahrain’s parliament approved the trial of

civilians at military tribunals in a measure blasted by human rights campaigners as being tantamount to imposition of an undeclared martial law countrywide.

Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah ratified the constitutional amendment on April 3 last year.

Iran ...

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In 2013 alone, Iran spent more than \$26 million to dig canals, erect walls and embankments, create new outposts and set up barbed wire along its 2,000-kilometer (1240-mile) border with Afghanistan and Pakistan, according to government statistics.

In 2012, Iran accounted for two thirds of the world’s opium seizures and one fourth of the world’s heroin and morphine seizures, a UN report published in 2014 showed.

“We have been just as determined in the fight against terrorism ... sacrificing hundreds of valuable troops and spending millions of dollars annually,” Rouhani said.

The European Union is working on a payment system, known as the “special purpose vehicle”, to keep money flowing into Iran, but has struggled to find a host since many countries fear repercussions from the Trump administration.

The conference in Tehran was the second regional meeting on terrorism -- the first was held last December in Islamabad.

Fresh ...

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About 100 protesters were detained, many for carrying dangerous objects like fireworks or clothing that could be used as protection in clashes with police.

The reasons for the protests are not entirely clear. Neither Belgium nor the Netherlands has proposed a hike in fuel tax — the catalyst for the massive and destructive demonstrations in France in recent weeks.

Instead, protesters appeared to hail at least in part from a populist movement that is angry at government policy in general and what it sees as the widening gulf between mainstream politicians and the voters who put them in power. Some in Belgium appeared intent only on confronting police.

The rallies, which started at different locations around the city and converged on the European quarter, disrupted road and rail traffic on one of the busiest Christmas shopping days of the year.

Walking behind a banner reading “social winter is coming,” the protesters chanted “(French President Emmanuel) Macron, Michel resign.”

Several hundred police officers were mobilized. Last week, yellow vest protesters clashed with police and torched two police vehicles in the same area. More than 70 people were detained.

In the Dutch city of Rotterdam, a few hundred protesters in the high-visibility vests that have become a symbol of the movement walked peacefully across the downtown Erasmus Bridge singing a song about the Netherlands and handing flowers to passers-by.

Sisters Beb and Ieneke Lambermont, aged 76 and 67 respectively, were among them.

“Our children are hard-working people but they have to pay taxes everywhere. You can’t get housing anymore. It is not going well in Dutch society,” Ieneke said. “The social welfare net we grew up with is gone,” she said.

“The government is not there for the people. It is there to protect its own interests,” she said.

Protesters also gathered in a peaceful demonstration outside the Dutch parliament in The Hague. At least two protesters were detained by police in central Amsterdam.

Jan Dijkgraaf, the editor of a Dutch “resistance newspaper” had called for peaceful protests in Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

Dijkgraaf said people are yearning for a past, more socially equitable, era of Dutch history, describing it as “a feeling of unity, but also looking after

asylum-seekers well, taking good care of one another.”

U.S. ...

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Damascus and its allies have repeatedly accused the U.S. of using the base to retrain and reequip former militant groups to continue the war against the Syrian government.

On Thursday, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford said that the U.S. would have to train 35,000 to 40,000 more “local forces” to “provide stability” in eastern Syria, where U.S.-backed Kurdish militants are based.

Washington, which originally justified its presence in Syria by citing the war against terrorism, has altered its reasoning for remaining in the country following Daesh’s decline.

In September, Trump national security adviser John Bolton said that the U.S. military would stay in Syria until alleged Iranian-backed militias had also left the country.

Rouhani:...

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Rouhani also voiced Iran’s willingness for closer interaction with Turkey in various fields, such as the energy and banking.

The Turkish speaker referred to the threat of terrorism as the common enemy of Turkey and Iran, saying terrorism in the region needs a regional solution and that interference by trans-regional powers would only complicate the situation.

Yildirim also gave assurances that Turkey will maintain relations with Iran under any circumstances as he denounced U.S. sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Rouhani separately told Pakistani parliament speaker Asad Qaiser that those who created terrorist groups did a great injustice to the region.

“Many of these terrorist groups were created amid a proxy war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but they took other forms and objectives later,” he said.

Rouhani described Pakistan as a brotherly neighbor for Iran, saying groups based along the two countries’ joint borders are a threat to their security.

Qaiser said the Pakistani government and its people and political parties are united against terrorism and Islamabad is ready to cooperate with Tehran on combating terrorism and expanding regional security.

He said Iran and Pakistan enjoy cordial and friendly ties that cannot be harmed by anyone.

Four ...

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“They think the kind of terrorism that is in line with their purposes is not considered to be terrorism worthy of condemnation,” he added.

Alavi spoke in Tehran on the sidelines of a counter-terrorism conference participated by senior parliamentarians from Iran, China, Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey.

The minister said countries need to protect their sovereignty by promoting their intelligence might in order to prevent the growth of terrorism.

Police Chief Brigadier General Hussein Ashtari said Iran will decisively confront the elements behind the Chabahar bombing.

He said the attacker had tried to infiltrate the facility two days ago, but failed thanks to the rapid reaction of the police.

“Enemies are trying to make the country insecure but they should know that through these blind and desperate acts, they will not be able to affect the people and the determination of the armed forces in defending the country,” Ashtari added.

French PM Calls for Lifting Zionist Blockade on Gaza

PARIS (Dispatches) – French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe has called for lifting the blockade by the Zionist regime on the Gaza Strip after he met with his Palestinian counterpart Rami Hamdallah.

The two held the meeting in the French capital Paris, during which Philippe called for the “lifting of the Israeli blockade” imposed on Gaza and the reconciliation of the two rival Palestinian movements.

“There will be no peace without a lasting solution for Gaza, which requires inter-Palestinian reconciliation and the lifting of the Israeli blockade,” he said.

The Palestinian prime minister reiterated his call for an

international conference with “wide-ranging stakeholders” to “get the peace process going again.”

Gaza has been under a land, air and sea blockade by the occupying regime since June 2007. The siege has caused a decline in living standards as well as unprecedented unemployment and poverty.

Philippe also raised concern over the “alarming situation” in the region due to “the acceleration of the Israeli occupation” and confrontations between the Palestinians and Zionist troops near the fence separating Gaza from the occupied territories.

Tensions have been running high near the fence since March 30, which marked the start of a series of protests called “The Great March of Return.” Palestinian protesters demand the right to return for those driven out of their homeland.

Some 240 Palestinians have been killed and over 20,000 others wounded in the renewed Gaza clashes, according to the latest figures released by the Gaza Health Ministry.

The last round of the so-called peace talks between Zionists and Palestinians collapsed in 2014. The regime’s illegal settlement activities and its refusal to release

senior Palestinian prisoners were among major stumbling blocks.

Palestinians are seeking to create an independent state on the territories of the West Bank, East al-Quds, and the Gaza Strip.

The regime, however, has refused to return to the 1967 borders and is unwilling to discuss the issue of occupied al-Quds.

France, Palestine sign agreements

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki, who also visited Paris, signed agreements in different fields with his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian on Saturday.

Turkey’s Top Spy in U.S. to Meet Senators, Intelligence Officials

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – Turkey’s head of intelligence has traveled to Washington to meet with U.S. lawmakers and intelligence officials, sources said, in an apparent bid to improve ties with the Americans after a breakdown in the NATO allies’ relationship last summer.

Hakan Fidan, a close confidant of Turkey’s President Tayyip Erdogan, has met with senators to discuss NATO issues and was expected to meet with U.S. intelligence officials, according to five sources familiar with the matter, who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity.

The killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi

consulate in Istanbul was discussed in the meeting with members and staff of the NATO Observer Group, a bipartisan group of senators that advocates for the alliance, two sources familiar with the matter said.

But it was not a central subject in discussions with senators and the Turkish side has refrained from making it the focus of their meetings, the sources added.

Top U.S. senators have said they want to punish Saudi Arabia for the killing, despite President Donald Trump’s decision to stand by the long-time ally.

While the two countries have

collaborated on the Khashoggi investigation, U.S.-Turkey ties have been strained by disagreements over a number of issues from Syria to Turkey’s desire to buy Russian defense systems.

Relations between Ankara and Washington began to improve after U.S. pastor Andrew Brunson, who was on trial over terrorism-related charges in Turkey, was released in October.

But the NATO allies remain divided on other issues, including U.S. policy in Syria, Ankara’s ambition to purchase Russian missile defense systems and Turkey’s request for the United States to extradite Fethullah

Gulen, a cleric Ankara blames for organizing an abortive 2016 putsch. Gulen denies involvement.

Fidan was expected to discuss the murder of Khashoggi, a Washington post columnist and critic of the Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in his meeting with U.S. intelligence officials, sources said. It was not immediately clear if Fidan was to meet with Gina Haspel, director of the CIA.

The CIA has assessed with medium to high confidence that the crown prince, the kingdom’s de facto ruler, ordered the killing of Khashoggi when he visited the consulate on Oct. 2.

‘U.S., France Step Up Search for Baghdadi in Syria, Iraq’

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S., French, Syrian and Iraqi security forces have significantly stepped up efforts to search for Daesh leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in the Syrian-Iraqi border area, the TV channel Alsumaria has reported, citing a source in the Syrian province Anbar’s security agency.

According to the media outlet, the ongoing operation involves drones, with the area being increasingly combed by search brigades.

“Every day, UAVs are examining dozens of kilometers of the deserted territory, as well as agriculture fields on both sides of the Euphrates, all the way from Al Bagur (Syria) to Makr-ez-Zin (Iraq)”, representatives for the Iraqi security agencies noted.

“The agencies are competing over who would be the first to kill or detain the Daesh head Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi”, he remarked, adding that the border region had virtually turned into a “battlefield”

for the security forces.

On 4 December, U.S. Lt Gen Kenneth McKenzie, nominated as the next chief of the U.S. Central Command (Centcom), stated that al-Baghdadi is still alive and is hiding “somewhere in a desert by the Euphrates”.

In October, the Daesh leader was reported to have ordered the execution of 320 of his followers, including senior commanders, for “disloyalty” and “recklessness”.

During the war against Daesh in

Syria and Iraq, al-Baghdadi more than once evaded assassination attempts made by the Russian, U.S. and Iranian militaries. In September, Iraqi media reported that al-Baghdadi had narrowly escaped death after showing up late to a meeting of terrorist commanders. The terrorist is believed to have issued his latest address to his followers in August, urging them to continue their battle and to “burn the infidels.”