

### Explosion on Gaza Fishing Boat Kills 3

GAZA CITY (Dispatches) – Three Palestinian fishermen were killed Sunday after a blast ripped through their boat off the Gaza shore, officials said.

Nezar Ayyash, of the association that represents fishermen, said the anglers – two brothers and a cousin – were off the coast of the city of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip when the explosion happened.

The cause of the blast was not immediately clear.

Palestinian media reports blamed the Zionist regime's navy fire. The interior ministry in Gaza said it opened an investigation.

If the right usurped from us is given back to us we shall take it, otherwise we shall go on claiming it.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

# Yemeni Forces Closing In on Ma'rib, Down Saudi Spy Plane

SANA'A (Dispatches) – Yemeni forces are closing in on the strategic central city of Ma'rib for a key battle against Saudi-led militants loyal to former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi and their terrorist allies.

Local media outlets reported that the Yemeni forces are now only seven kilometers from Ma'rib, the last stronghold of pro-Hadi forces in northern Yemen, the loss of which would mean the defeat of the Saudi-backed regime.

Over the past few weeks, Ma'rib has been the scene of large-scale operations by Yemeni troops and allied Popular Committees fighters, who are pushing against Saudi-sponsored pro-Hadi militants.

A Yemeni military official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said armed units fighting around Ma'rib have tightened the noose around the Saudi-led forces and continue to gain ground.

Medical sources said scores of militants were killed and injured during clashes on Friday. Hadi sources confirmed that 32 of their fighters had been killed in fighting around Ma'rib governorate over a single day.

Reports said Moin al-Wali, a commander of the al-Saqour (Falcons) brigade, was killed. Colonel Abdullah Mohammed al-Hamza, a pro-Hadi commander on the al-Kassara front, was also among the



Supporters of Yemen's Ansarullah movement hold up their weapons during a demonstration in Sana'a, Yemen, on January 18, 2021.

casualties.

Lebanon-based al-Mayadeen television said Yemeni forces had liberated several strategic heights in the northwest of the province after intense fighting.

They wrested control of Hama Dhiab and al-Nadhoud hills from the Saudi-led forces, which include Hadi loyalists and militants affiliated with the Salafist Islah party.

In another development, Yemen's Ansarullah movement, also known as the Houthis, downed a Saudi Air Force Karayel reconnaissance plane, built by Turkey, the movement's Al-Masirah TV channel said Sunday.

The Yemeni Foreign Ministry

called on the UN and other international organizations to take a rational approach to the ongoing battle in Ma'rib province.

In a statement carried by Yemen's official Saba news agency on Saturday, the Yemeni ministry said the UN and international statements regarding the issue generally "lack a minimum of logic" and are not based on any understandable standards.

It expressed deep regret over such a biased approach regarding the issue of peace in Yemen.

The Yemeni Foreign Ministry noted that the UN and international statements and other political and media positions wrongfully

question the Sana'a government's desire for peace and ignore its "natural and legitimate right to self-defense."

According to the ministry, the Saudi-led coalition of war on Yemen established the Ma'rib front in order to invade the capital, Sana'a, and it remained the starting point for all terrorist operations against Sana'a.

On Thursday, the UN chief's spokesperson Stephane Dujarric voiced 'deep concerns' by the "recent reports of increased Houthi [Ansarullah] cross-border attacks against Saudi Arabia."

Yemeni army troops and allied fighters from Popular Committees have launched numerous retaliatory missile attacks against Saudi positions and targets, including the kingdom's oil facilities, in response to the Riyadh regime's acts of aggression and military campaign against their country.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched the war on Yemen in March 2015 with the goal of bringing the former Riyadh-friendly regime back to power.

Nearly six years later, however, the goal still remains as elusive as ever, with tens of thousands of people killed, much of Yemen's infrastructure destroyed and horrifying outbreaks of cholera and hunger bordering on famine underway.

## Abbas Battles Fatah Party Discord Ahead of Palestinian Elections



Marwan Barghouti, a popular Palestinian leader, gestures as Zionist police bring him into the District Court for his judgment hearing in Tel Aviv May 20, 2004.

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) – Facing elections for the first time in 15 years, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is battling a growing rift within his Fatah party that poses a new threat to his dominance over Palestinian politics.

A breakaway bid by one of Abbas's party allies has intensified speculation he might cancel a presidential vote planned for July, fearing a potential challenge by Marwan Barghouti, a popular Palestinian leader jailed by the occupying regime.

Abbas's office denies he has plans to delay or scrub the presidential vote.

Barghouti, now 61, was a driving force in Palestinians' 2000-2005 uprising in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. He was sentenced by an Israeli court in 2004 to life imprisonment after being convicted over multiple lethal attacks on Zionists by Palestinian fighters. Barghouti has always denied the charges.

Abbas, 85, has ruled the Palestinian Authority (PA) in self-rule areas of the West Bank by decree for over a decade. In January, he announced presidential and legislative ballots - a move largely seen as a response to criticism of his presidency's democratic legitimacy.

Adding to that criticism is Nasser al-Qudwa, a longtime member of Fatah's top Central Committee

who last week announced he was forming a new list that would run separately from Fatah in the legislative election, in May.

"(Palestinians) are fed up with the current situation ... internal behavior or misbehavior, things like the absence of the rule of the law, the absence of equality, the absence of fairness," Qudwa, a nephew of late Fatah founder and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat, told Reuters.

It is rare for leaders on the 19-member Central Committee members to publicly break with Abbas.

Qudwa, 67, said he hoped his list would be led by Barghouti, a Fatah leader long floated as a potential Abbas successor.

Barghouti has not said if he will join the list or run in the presidential ballot. He and his lawyer declined a request to interview him. But opinion polls suggest he would win comfortably against Abbas.

Abbas has tried to resolve the discord by dispatching a loyalist to visit Barghouti in prison and, through emissaries, preaching party unity after Qudwa announced his new list.

Abbas is due on Monday to convene a meeting of Fatah's Central Committee, where he is expected to formally sanction Qudwa.

Qudwa told Reuters he does not plan to attend committee meetings.

## Road-Blocking Protests Continue Across Lebanon

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanese demonstrators pressed on with their road-blocking protests on Sunday as the political stalemate continued in the country.

In Beirut, protesters blocked the roads leading to Martyrs Square with burning tires.

The highway linking Beirut to the south was meanwhile blocked for a few hours in the Jiye area.

Protesters also blocked the Elia roundabout in Sidon and the army was trying to reopen it.

The National News Agency said young men were burning tires there in protest at the dire living situations and the surge in the dollar exchange rate.

In the north, protesters blocked the Minieh international highway at the Bhannine intersection, placing trucks, rocks and

tires in the middle of the road.

"Motorists between Tripoli, Minieh and Akkar had to take alternative routes," NNA said.

Protests were also reported elsewhere across the country, where one dollar has come to be valued at around 10,000 Lebanese dinars.

President Michel Aoun has ordered an investigation into the sheer fall of the national currency's value and punishment of those responsible for the potential corruption that has brought the situation about.

The economy has been in a free fall since former prime minister Saad Hariri announced his own and his cabinet's resignation in October 2019.

Ever since, internal divisions and external pressure by some Western countries, including

France -- Lebanon's former colonial power -- over the configuration of any new government, have prevented the formation of a formal cabinet that could enter negotiations for economic assistance with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Amid the already incendiary circumstances, the capital was shaken with an ear-splitting explosion last year that had reportedly resulted from dangerous stockpiling of some 750 tons of ammonium nitrate. As many as 190 people died in the tragedy that was followed by huge rallies against official-level maladministration. The damages from the disaster have been calculated at more than \$10 billion.

The United States has also taken Lebanon under sanctions. Caretaker Prime Minister Has-

san Diab delivered a televised address on Saturday, lashing out against the foot-dragging that had prevented the formation of a new government.

"The Lebanese are suffering from a serious social crisis that is likely to worsen if a new capable government is not formed, a government driven by internal political impetus and external support to deal with this crisis," he said.

"The equation is clear: we cannot solve the social crisis without resolving the financial crisis; we cannot solve the financial crisis without resuming negotiations with the IMF; we cannot carry on negotiations with the IMF without undertaking reforms, and we cannot carry out reforms without forming a new government," he noted.

## Women Downtrodden by Occupying Regime: Official Report

AL-QUDS (Dispatches) – Women accounted for only 28 percent of managerial positions in the occupying regime in 2020, according to an annual report published by the regime's own Central Bureau of Statistics on Sunday.

In 2019, for comparison, women held 30.3 percent of managerial positions in the occupied territories.

The report was issued ahead of the International Women's Day to be marked on Monday.

In the hi-tech field, 125,000 women were employed in the occupied territories in 2020, out of a total of 360,000 hi-tech employees,

or 34.7 percent.

In 2019, the rate of women employed in hi-tech was higher at 35.2 percent.

The women population was 4,677,700 at the end of 2020, about 50.3 percent of the total 9.291 million population, according to the report.

Meanwhile, thirty-five female Palestinian prisoners are currently behind bars in the occupied territories, a local NGO announced ahead of the International Women's Day, noting that eleven of the prisoners are mothers.

In a statement carried by Palestine's official Wafa news agency, the Palestinian Prisoner

Society (PPS) said 26 of the female prisoners had been sentenced to varying periods, the longest belonging to two prisoners, Shurooq Dwayyat and Shatila Abu Ayyad, who were each serving a jail sentence of 16 years.

Three of the prisoners are being held without charge or trial under the so-called administrative detention, the rights NGO added.

The Israeli administrative detention is a form of incarceration without trial or charge that allows the occupying regime's authorities to detain Palestinians for up to six months. The period, however, can be extended for an infinite number of times.

## Beirut, Damascus Agree to Boost Cooperation on Syrian Refugees

BEIRUT (Sputnik) – Syrian Foreign Minister Faysal Mikdad and Lebanese Minister of Tourism and Social Affairs Ramzi Moucharafieh discussed the return of Syrian refugees during a meeting in Damascus, the Syrian state news agency, SANA, reports.

The ministers agreed to boost cooperation in their efforts to facilitate the return of Syrian refugees home, a process that is quite complicated amid the coronavirus pandemic and economic difficulties that both Syria and Lebanon are experiencing.

Both ministers called on international organizations not to create obstacles for the return of

Syrians home.

Lebanon is home to some 1.5 million Syrian refugees, most of whom live in camps in the Beqaa Valley and the Akkar region in the country's north. According to the United Nations, the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon living below the poverty line increased from 55 percent in 2019 to 89 percent in 2020.

The Lebanese authorities have repeatedly urged the international community to facilitate dignified repatriation of Syrians. Damascus hosted the first international conference on the return of refugees in November of last year, but Western countries abstained from the event.