

BAGHDAD (Xinhua) – Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid has emphasized the importance of expanding cooperation between Iraq and Lebanon in various fields.

Rashid made the remarks during a meeting with visiting Lebanese caretaker Labor Minister Mustafa Bayram in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, according to a statement released by the Iraqi presidency.

“The president highlighted the need to upgrade the relations between the two countries in economic, commercial and cultural fields,” the statement said.

Grief is half of old age. Grant of patience (from Allah) is in proportion to the extent of calamity you are passing through. If you exhibit fretfulness, irritation, and despair in calamities, then your patience and your exertions are wasted.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

UN: Quakes Leave 1.5mn People Homeless in Turkey

GENEVA (Xinhua/Al Jazeera) – A United Nations Development Program (UNDP) official has estimated that 1.5 million people in Turkey have been left homeless by the recent earthquakes and some 500,000 housing units in the country will have to be rebuilt.

Louisa Vinton, the UNDP's Turkey resident representative, told an online press briefing that the country's government had inspected around 70 percent of the buildings affected by the quakes. Of these, 412,000 housing units in 118,000 buildings have collapsed or need to be demolished completely.

She said that the amount of rubble that needed to be cleared was enormous, and that the UNDP was seeking to minimize the threat of hazardous waste.

According to Vinton, two weeks after the first quakes, there is reason to call this the largest natural disaster in Turkey's history.

She said that the government concluded the search and rescue phase for the first quakes on Sunday, and the last survivor was pulled from the rubble almost 300 hours after the quake.

Catherine Smallwood, senior emergency officer for the World Health Organization (WHO), told the press briefing that managing the risks of communicable diseases is now vital as several displaced people live in close quar-



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ters, sometimes with poor access to toilets and clean water.

“There is a heightened risk of respiratory illnesses, cholera, hepatitis A and measles,” she said.

In recent weeks, Turkey's southern Kahramanmaraş province has been rattled by a series of earthquakes ranging from magnitude 6.4 to 7.7.

The quakes also hit parts of Syria. In total, an estimated 47,000 people have lost their lives in the two countries, according to media reports.

At least 160 suspects were remanded in custody across Turkey over the collapse of buildings following the 6 deadly quakes, according to judicial sources on

Wednesday, Anadolu News Agency reports.

Turkish prosecutors charged 564 suspects as part of the investigation on collapsed buildings or flouting of construction codes, the sources said.

At least 175 suspects were released under judicial control, which means they will regularly have to report to their nearest police station.

In addition, arrest warrants were issued for 71 suspects and detention orders were issued for 61 others.

While 18 people are still in custody by the order of the Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, according to the sources, 11 other

suspects have died. Six suspects are abroad, the sources added.

Engineers Count Cost of Rebuilding in Syria

Engineers have been painstakingly assessing the safety of buildings in northwestern Syria, which was devastated by earthquakes this month after years of conflict and bombardments that had already destroyed homes and hospitals.

Since the first earthquake struck the Turkey-Syria border region on February 6, hundreds of families in Idlib have been sheltering on agricultural land. Their homes were either flattened or so damaged that they were rendered uninhabitable.

The Idlib authorities have said that more than 100 cities, towns and villages in that region alone were affected, with 812 buildings demolished and 5,937 damaged.

The Syrian Engineers Association in Idlib is working with the local administration to check buildings that are still standing after the earthquakes and thousands of powerful aftershocks.

“About 20 buildings [several storeys high] are inspected daily by the engineering committee,” said civil engineer Mustafa Haj Lattouf, who heads one of the structural safety committees in Idlib. They check about 40 houses a day as well.

Zionist Troops Assault Palestinian Inmates, Move Them to Unknown Place



Palestinian prisoners in a Zionist prison in the occupied territories.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Zionist troops have violently ransacked cells of Palestinian prisoners in the Ramon prison before transferring dozens of them to an unknown location.

According to the Palestinian Prisoners' Society, the troops raided Section 3 of the detention center and used pepper spray on Palestinian prisoners.

The advocacy group added that some 80 prisoners were transferred from the Ramon jail to another unknown location.

The Asra Media Office (AMO), another Palestinian prisoners' rights group, said Zionist troops fired tear gas canisters, stun grenades, and rubber bullets at the prisoners before transferring them to another jail.

There was no immediate information about injuries among the Palestinian detainees.

The report prompted the Gaza-based Hamas resistance movement to denounce the vicious assault. It held Israel fully responsible for protecting Palestinian prisoners, stressing that such attacks and violations are carried out systematically.

Hamas spokesman Abdul-Latif Qanu said in a press statement that the Zionist regime's acts of

aggression and crimes would not manage to undermine Palestinian prisoners' willpower. He called on Palestinians from all walks of life to stand in solidarity with the inmates in order to achieve their rights and freedom.

Voicing his group's full solidarity with Palestinian prisoners, Qanu said suppressing Palestinian prisoners and depriving them of their basic human rights will only make them more determined to continue their struggle.

More than 7,000 Palestinian prisoners are currently held in some 17 the regime's jails, with dozens of them serving multiple life sentences.

Palestinian detainees have continuously resorted to open-ended hunger strikes in an attempt to express their outrage at the detentions and harsh conditions in the occupying regime's jails.

Senior Palestinian officials say the regime must be held accountable for its persecution of Palestinian people, including its mass and arbitrary detentions.

Palestinian inmates have also been subjected to systematic torture, harassment and repression all through the years of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Jordan Sentences Three to Death Over Daesh Links

AMMAN (AFP) – A Jordanian court on Wednesday sentenced three people to death by hanging on charges of belonging to Daesh group and staging two bombing attacks, an AFP correspondent said.

A total of 11 people were handed sentences ranging from five years in prison to death, in the same case relating to attacks in 2018 that killed six members of the Jordanian security forces.

The court condemned three to death, including one in absentia, over accusations of “involvement in terrorist acts using weapons and explosives that led to the death of one person.”

The remaining convicts were handed prison sentences ranging between five and 20 years.

Three others, including two women, were acquitted and released.

According to the indictment, the 11 convicts had “shared news about Daesh group...”

They were also found to have formed “a criminal gang with the aim of undermining the security and stability of the kingdom... and undertaking armed terrorist operations” in Jordan.

They had planned to target buses carrying security forces, as well as an intelligence building and police patrols, the indictment said.

In August 2018, two policemen were killed and six others injured in a blast after a car bomb was planted on a police car tasked with protecting a cultural festival about 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) west of the capital.

The following day, four policemen were killed after clashes and another explosion during a raid on the building that the attackers had used as a hideout.

Three of the attackers also died during the clashes, that took place about 30 kilometers northwest of Amman.

U.S. Judge: 9/11 Families Not Entitled to Afghan Bank Funds

WASHINGTON (Al Jazeera / Reuters) – A United States judge has ruled that family members of victims of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks are not entitled to funds from Afghanistan's central bank.

In the ruling, U.S. District Judge George Daniels said that awarding the families money seized from the Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) would require an assessment that the Taliban is the legitimate government of Afghanistan, a decision he was “constitutionally restrained” from making.

“The judgment creditors are entitled to collect on their default judgments and be made whole for the worst terrorist attack in our na-

tion's history, but they cannot do so with the funds of the central bank of Afghanistan,” Daniels wrote.

“The Taliban — not the former Islamic Republic of Afghanistan or the Afghan people — must pay for the Taliban's liability in the 9/11 attacks,” he added.

In February 2022, the administration of U.S. President Joe Biden issued a controversial executive order stating it would split \$7bn in frozen assets from Afghanistan's central bank between the Afghan people and families of 9/11 victims who sued the Taliban.

While the Taliban was not directly involved in the attacks, lawyers for the families argued it had helped enable Al-Qaeda, which

mounted the attack, by allowing the group to operate in Afghanistan.

Bilal Askaryar, an Afghan-American activist, told Al Jazeera at the time of the order that the Afghan people “had nothing to do with 9/11” and called the decision a “theft of public funds from an impoverished nation”.

Tuesday's ruling upholds a previous decision in August 2022, when U.S. Magistrate Judge Sarah Netburn also recommended that victims of 9/11 could not seize cash from the Afghan central bank to satisfy court judgments against the Taliban.

Doing so would mean acknowledging the Taliban as the legiti-

mate rulers of Afghanistan, something Netburn said only the U.S. president can do.

Since the Taliban swept aside the U.S.-backed government and took power in August 2021, the Biden administration has not recognized the group as the country's official ruling party.

In response to the ruling, Lee Wolosky, a lawyer for one creditor group known as the Havlish plaintiffs, called the conclusion “wrongly decided” and said the group would appeal.

“This decision deprives over 10,000 members of the 9/11 community of their right to collect compensation from the Taliban,” he said.

Pakistan Officials in Kabul to Meet Taliban After Deadly Attacks

KABUL (AFP) – Pakistan's defence minister and spy chief were in Kabul Wednesday for talks with the Taliban government, days after Islamabad blamed Afghanistan-based militants for deadly recent attacks.

The main border crossing between the two countries has been closed since late Sunday, with a gun battle erupting the next morning that each side blamed the other for starting.

Pakistan accuses the Afghan Taliban of harboring militants from its own home-grown version of the militant group, a charge Kabul denies.

Afghan officials said Wednesday deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghani Baradar met Pakistan Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif and Nadeem Anjum, head of the Inter-Services Intelligence agency.

They discussed “bilateral relations, trade, regional connectivity and economic cooperation between the

two countries”, Baradar's office said.

Pakistan's foreign ministry confirmed the visit, saying “security related matters including counter-terrorism measures” would be discussed.

Pakistan has seen a dramatic increase in militant attacks, mainly in border regions, in the year-and-a-half of Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

However, a suicide squad also stormed a police compound in the southern port city of Karachi last Friday, killing five people.

A suicide bomber killed more than 80 police officers at a mosque in Peshawar, the provincial capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in January.

Both attacks were linked to Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has deep ties with the Afghan Taliban.

The border crossing at Torkham, a key crossing point for goods and people, remained closed Wednes-

day.

Officials on both sides said Afghan authorities closed the border late Sunday after Pakistan imposed new rules preventing entry to those accompanying medical patients without the right documentation.

Gunfire erupted the next morning, with both sides blaming the other for the violence.

Also at the weekend, Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari told the Munich Security Conference that Afghanistan had to deliver on promises not to harbour militants.

“There's a whole alphabet soup of terrorist organisations that have and still do base themselves out of Afghanistan,” he said.

Kabul's foreign ministry spokesman Abdul Qahar Balkhi said in response Zardari's remarks “are untrue”.