

Death Toll Rises to 11 in Building Collapse

TEHRAN -- Rescuers dug through debris Tuesday of a building collapse in southwestern Iran that killed at least 11 people, fearful that many more could still be trapped beneath the rubble as authorities arrested the city's mayor in a widening probe of the disaster.

The collapse Monday of an under-construction 10-story tower at the Metropolis Building exposed its cement blocks and steel beams.

Video from the initial collapse Monday showed thick dust rise over Abadan, a crucial oil-producing city in Khuzestan province, near Iran's border with Iraq.

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Kayhan International

Judiciary: Djalali's Execution to Go Ahead

TEHRAN -- Judiciary spokesperson Masoud Setayeshi said Tuesday that Iranian national Ahmadreza Djalali convicted of spying would be executed in due course.

In his first press conference in post, Setayeshi ruled out exchanging Djalali with another prisoner and any link between the Djalali case and Hamid Nouri, a former Iranian official on trial in Sweden over trumped-up charges.

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Viewpoint

Iran's Firm Resolve for Regional Stability

Good Iran-Oman Ties to Help Increase Regional Cooperation



Iran to Host 2 Int'l Beach Volleyball Events



Yemeni Forces Shoot Down Saudi Spy Drone



Egyptian Islands Being Used as Bargaining Chip Report: U.S. Brokering Saudi-Zionist Normalization

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) -- The Biden administration is reportedly brokering talks aimed at finalizing the transfer of two Red Sea islands from Egypt to Saudi Arabia in an agreement Israel hopes will include steps by Riyadh toward normalizing ties with the Zionist regime.

In 2017, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi ratified a treaty to hand over Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia. The deal withstood protests and legal challenges in Egypt but was never finalized.

The two Red Sea islands figure prominently in the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement signed in 1979, which promises safe passage to Israeli civilian and military ships through the narrow waterways of the Straits of Tiran.

As part of the 1979 peace deal, Egypt agreed to demilitarize multinational observers led by the United States and allow the presence of a force of multinational observers led by the U.S. to patrol the islands. Their transfer to Saudi Arabia, therefore, requires a degree of Israeli buy-in in order to move forward.

The island transfer, first announced in April 2016, had fueled rare protests in Egypt with opponents of Sissi accusing him of having traded the islands for Saudi largesse. The government said the islands were Saudi to begin with but were leased to Egypt in the 1950s.

The Straits of Tiran are the Zionist regime's only water passage from Eilat to the open sea, allowing for shipping to and from Africa and Asia without requiring passage through the Suez Canal, as well as passage to and from the Suez Canal. Israel Navy ships use the waterway to reach open seas, where they carry out naval exercises that are not possible in the narrow confines of the Gulf of Aqaba. The Egyptian blockade of the waterway to Israeli shipping in 1967 was a key casus belli for the Zionist regime that led to the onset of the Six-Day War.

Nonetheless, Israel offered its principled approval for the island transfer, while conditioning it on an agreed-upon solution regarding the multinational observer force, Axios reported, citing U.S. and Zionist sources.

The multinational squad turned into a main sticking point in the talks, as Riyadh agreed to keep the islands demilitarized while thus far rejecting such a force on its territory, Axios said. Riyadh instead offered a commitment to maintaining full freedom of navigation for ships through the Straits of Tiran.

Israeli negotiators showed willingness to forgo the multinational force but asked for alternative security arrangements, according to Axios.

The occupying regime is also asking that Saudi Arabia take a number of steps toward normalizing ties with Israel — namely allowing additional Israeli flights to use Saudi airspace and allowing direct flights between the Zionist entity and Saudi Arabia to allow Muslims to easily travel to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina from Ben Gurion Airport.

After the Abraham Accords were signed in 2020, Saudi Arabia began allowing Israeli airlines to use its airspace for flights to and from the UAE and Bahrain. But the occupying regime has not yet received such access for flights to India, Thailand and China, which are significantly longer as a result.

While Riyadh gave its blessing to client states UAE and Bahrain to normalize ties with Israel, it has refrained from taking the same step, saying it would not do so absent a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The U.S. believes an agreement on the islands could build trust between the occupying regime of Israel and Saudi Arabia needed to take more far-reaching steps toward normalization.

The White House is hoping to broker an agreement before U.S. President Joe Biden's expected trip to the region late next month. A date has not been set, and the White House has only confirmed that the president will be coming to Occupied Palestine, but CNN reported last week that U.S. officials are seeking to organize a meeting between Biden and Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman.

Washington has slowly sought to improve ties with Riyadh after Biden came down hard on the latter and its crown prince during his election campaign over the country's killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi.

But as Russia's war in Ukraine continues to rock the global energy market, the U.S. is finding itself increasingly reliant on Saudi Arabia, the world's largest crude oil exporter.

Biden's trip is also slated to include a summit with the leaders of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, several Arab sources told Axios. Biden is hoping to get an agreement in place before his trip to the Middle East at the end of June, Axios reported on Monday.

Iranians Bid Farewell to IRGC Colonel Amid Pledges of 'Harsh Vengeance',



Mourners throng Imam Hussein Square in Tehran for funeral of Colonel Sayyad Khodai on Tuesday.

TEHRAN -- Thousands attended the funeral Tuesday of an Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) colonel who was assassinated in Tehran in what authorities have dubbed the work of agents of the United States and its allies.

Colonel Sayyad Khodai was martyred on Sunday by a gunman on the back of a motorcycle as he sat in his car outside his home.

President Ebrahim Raisi vowed on Monday to avenge the terrorist act -- the most high profile inside

Iran since that of top nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in November 2020.

Iran had pointed the finger at the occupying regime of Israel as masterminding that attack.

The national broadcaster described Khodai as a member of the Quds Force -- the foreign operations arm of the IRGC.

It had previously reported that the colonel was "known" in Syria, where Iran has backed the country during an 11-year war foreign-

backed takfiri terrorism and where it acknowledges deploying "military advisers".

A large crowd gathered Tuesday morning at the Imam Hussein Square in central Tehran to pay their respects to the colonel, with many raising pictures of other martyrs fallen abroad.

Nearby, a billboard vowing a "harsh vengeance" for Khodai was erected alongside a portrait of General Qasem Soleimani, a revered Quds Force commander who was

assassinated in a U.S. drone strike in Iraq in January 2020.

The ceremony began at around 8:30 am (0400 GMT) with the national anthem and Qur'an recitations, followed by religious chanters paying tribute to the slain colonel.

Funeral prayers were led by the capital's top imam, Ayatollah Kazem Sediqi. Khodai's coffin was draped in the Iranian flag and posters hailing him as a "martyr".

A military vehicle carried the coffin to Shohada Square, near where he was assassinated.

Cries of "Death to America" and "death to Israel" reverberated as the procession wound its way across Tehran.

His body was to be laid at the Behesht-e Zahra cemetery south of Tehran, near the grave of Gen. Soleimani's bodyguard, also martyred during the 2020 U.S. strike, national television said.

The spokesman for the joint chiefs of staff of the Iranian armed forces, General Abolfazl Shekarchi, said on Monday that an investigation had been opened into the circumstances surrounding Khodai's murder.

The IRGC denounced his assassination as a "terrorist act", blaming it on "elements of global arrogance" -- in reference to the U.S. and its allies, including the occupying regime of Israel.

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Russia Steps Up Offensive to Capture Donbas

KYIV/SLOVYANSK, Ukraine (Dispatches) -- Russian forces were conducting an all-out assault on Tuesday to encircle Ukrainian troops in twin cities straddling a river in eastern Ukraine, a battle which could determine the success or failure of Moscow's main campaign in the east.

Exactly three months after President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian forces into Ukraine, the decisive battles of the war's latest phase are still raging, with Moscow attempting to seize the Donbas region of two eastern provinces, Donetsk and Luhansk, and trap Ukrainian forces in a pocket on the main eastern front.

The easternmost part of the Ukrainian-held Donbas pocket, the city of Sievierodonetsk on the east bank of the Siverskiy Donets river and its twin Lysychansk on the west bank, have become the pivotal battlefield there, with Russian forces advancing from three directions to encircle them.

"The enemy has focused its efforts on carrying out an offensive in order to encircle Lysychansk and Sievierodonetsk," said Serhiy Gaidai, governor of Luhansk province, where the two cities are

among the last territory still held by Ukraine.

"The intensity of fire on Sievierodonetsk has increased by multiple times, they are simply destroying the city," he said on TV, adding there were about 15,000 people living there.

Further west in Slovyansk, one of the biggest Donbas cities still in Ukrainian hands, air raid sirens wailed on Tuesday but streets were still busy, with a market full, children riding bikes and a street musician playing violin by a supermarket.

Gaidai said Ukrainian forces had driven the Russians out of the village of Toshkivka just south of Sievierodonetsk. Russian-backed separatists said they had taken control of Svitlodarsk, south of Bakhmut. Neither report could be independently confirmed.

Three months into the war, around 6.5 million people have fled abroad, uncounted thousands have been killed and cities have been reduced to rubble.

The war has also had massive international ramifications, including growing food shortages and soaring prices in developing countries that import Ukrainian grain.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen on Tuesday called for talks with Moscow on unlocking wheat exports now trapped in Ukraine because of a Russian blockade in the Black Sea.

Underlining the global geopolitical tensions unleashed by the war, Japan - a key U.S. ally in Asia which has joined Western sanctions against Russia - scrambled jets on Tuesday after Russian and Chinese warplanes neared its airspace during a visit to Tokyo by U.S. President Joe Biden.

Comments by senior Russian officials on Tuesday suggested plans for a drawn-out conflict ahead. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Russia was deliberately advancing slowly to avoid civilian casualties. Nikolai Patrushev, head of Putin's security council, said Moscow was not "chasing deadlines" and would fight as long as necessary to eradicate "Nazism" in Ukraine.

The Donbas fighting follows Russia's biggest victory in months: the surrender last week of Ukraine's garrison in the port of Mariupol after nearly three months of siege in which Kyiv believes tens of thousands of civilians have died.

Petro Andriyushchenko, an aide to Mariupol's Ukrainian mayor now operating outside the Russian-held city, said the dead were still being found in the rubble.

Around 200 decomposing bodies were buried in rubble in a basement of one high-rise building, he said. Locals had refused to collect them and Russian authorities had abandoned the site, leaving a stench across the district.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweeted that the "ruthless" offensive in Donbas showed Ukraine still needed more Western arms, especially multiple launch rocket systems, long-range artillery and armored vehicles.

Highlighting the obstacles to a diplomatic resolution of the conflict, a new poll on Tuesday showed 82% of Ukrainians believe their country should not sign away any territory as part of a peace deal with Russia under any circumstances.

Pentagon Mulls Sending 'High-Tech Weapons'

Nearly 50 defense leaders from around the world met Monday and

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