

Senior Shia Cleric Arrested, Son Attacked in Syria

DAMASCUS (Press TV) – A senior Syrian Shia cleric has been arrested and his son subjected to assault and battery in the Arab country's southwest as violence retains its hold on the nation following last year's foreign-backed ouster of Syria's democratically-elected government.

Sheikh Adham al-Khatib, who represents the followers of the Household of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the country, was nabbed in the city of Sayyida Zainab, Press TV's Syria Bureau reported.

Various other sources confirmed the development, adding that the incident had also involved physical and verbal attack against the cleric's son, Ja'afar, and the latter's companion.

There is no greater wealth than wisdom, no greater poverty than ignorance; no greater heritage than culture and no greater support than consultation.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Hezbollah Readies Massive Funeral for Martyred Leader Nasrallah

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon's Hezbollah is preparing for a massive turnout for the funeral on Sunday of its martyred leader Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah, an opportunity for a show of strength by the resistance movement.

Nasrallah's martyrdom nearly five months ago in a huge Israeli strike on Beirut's southern suburbs left Hezbollah supporters in disbelief and sent shockwaves across Lebanon and the region.

The country will stop for Sunday's funeral, to be held at 1:00 p.m. (1100 GMT) at the Camille Chamoun sports stadium on the capital's outskirts.

Hezbollah has announced strict security measures and urged security forces to help manage crowds that are expected to number in the tens of thousands, with people pouring in from Hezbollah strongholds across the country, as well as from abroad.

Hassan Wehbe, 60, an electrician in Beirut's southern suburbs, said the funeral would be "a historic day."

"There will be huge participation. Israel will see that we are not



A giant portrait of martyred Hezbollah leader Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah (R) and his heir apparent Hashem Safieddine watches over Beirut's airport highway ahead of their funeral on Sunday.

afraid," he said.

Hezbollah has invited senior Lebanese officials including the president.

Its key foreign backer Iran has said it will participate "at a high level," without specifying who will attend.

Nicholas Blanford, a Beirut-based Hezbollah expert and senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, said it was important for Hezbollah "to be able to demonstrate that they

haven't been cowed — that they are still a popular force" within the Shia community.

The funeral "is going to be exactly the event for that," he told AFP.

The ceremony is expected to last around an hour, including a speech by current leader Sheikh Naim Qassem, who has called for a huge turnout.

A procession will follow to Nasrallah's burial site near the airport road, now lined with yellow Hez-

bollah flags and images of him and other martyred Hezbollah figures.

Civil aviation authorities said Beirut airport will close exceptionally and flights will be suspended from midday until 4:00 pm.

After Nasrallah was martyred on September 27, the resistance movement delayed his funeral due to security concerns.

The ceremony will also be for Hashem Safieddine, who was chosen to succeed Seyyed Nasrallah before being martyred in a later Israeli strike.

Safieddine will be buried on Monday in his southern hometown of Deir Qanun al-Nahr.

The charismatic, bespectacled Nasrallah has long enjoyed massive popularity among his supporters.

For Ahmed Hallani, 35, taking part is "a religious and moral duty." Nasrallah is "our leader and the leader of our victories. We will stay beside him, alive or dead," he said.

Iraqi Airways and Lebanon's Middle East Airlines have increased services between Baghdad and Beirut ahead of the funeral.

UN: Syria Economic Recovery Needs More Than 50 Years

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – The United Nations has issued an alarming report on the economic impact of years of armed militancy in Syria.

The world body said Thursday it will take the country more than half a century to get back to its previous economic level.

"Fourteen years of conflict in Syria have undone nearly four decades of economic, social, and human capital progress," the UN Development Programme (UNDP) said.

"At current growth rates, Syria's economy will not regain its pre-

conflict GDP level before 2080," it added.

It called for massive investment in economic recovery after the fall of the government of Bashar al-Assad this year.

The UN study -- "The Impact of the Conflict in Syria" -- noted that 90 percent of Syrians now live in poverty, one quarter are jobless, and the GDP has shrunk to less than half of its value in 2011.

It added that a five percent annual growth would be needed over 15 years to get the Syrian economy back to the size it had in 2010. "Beyond immediate humanitar-

ian aid, Syria's recovery requires long-term investment in development to build economic and social stability for its people," said UNDP chief Achim Steiner.

"Restoring productivity for jobs and poverty relief, revitalizing agriculture for food security, and rebuilding infrastructure for essential services such as health-care, education and energy are key to a self-sustaining future, prosperity, and peace," he added.

A strategy including "governance reform," "economic stabilization" and "infrastructure rebuilding" was needed for Syria to

"regain control over its future, reduce reliance on external aid, and pave the way for a resilient and prosperous future," said Abdallah Al Dardari, UNDP regional chief for Arab states.

Armed groups, led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militants, announced on December 8 that they had fully captured the Syrian capital and announced the fall of President Assad's government.

Many believe that the U.S. created the Daesh terrorist group and helped it rise and commence its reign of terror and destruction in Syria and Iraq in 2014.

Spain Remains 'Major Transit Port' for Arms Shipments to Israel

MADRID (Dispatches) – Thousands of weapon shipments have been arriving in Tel Aviv via Spain for over 16 months, despite a ban on arms exports imposed by Madrid last year

Media reports citing an investigation said that over 60,000 weapon parts had been transported to the Israeli-occupied territories via Zaragoza airport in northern Spain since the start of the U.S.-Israeli genocide of Palestinians in October 2023.

The shipments had continued unimpeded despite a ban on arms exports to the occupied territories imposed by Madrid four months ago.

"The evidence indicates that these flights continue to this day," investigators said.

They stated that the shipments include "parts and accessories for artillery, rifles, rocket/grenade launchers and machine guns" and "parts and accessories for revolvers and pistols."

The arms route was detected using information from Israeli customs and flight tracking data.

Investigators identified at least six airlines operating these flights.

"Three of them, Challenge Air Cargo, National Air Cargo, and Atlas Air, had already been reported to be used to transport military cargo to Israel, chartered by the United States. Such flights have been documented from multiple US air bases, including Sigonella in Italy and al-Udeid in Qatar," the report highlights.

In response to the revelations, Spain's left-wing Podemos Party in a statement strongly censured the government following the revelations.

"After the lie with the ports, we now have this with Zaragoza airport. We demand that the government stop lying and act coherently: a total arms embargo and an end to relations with the genocidal Israeli entity, the party said.

UN Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese also on Thursday implored the Spanish government,

who has been an increasingly visible champion in defense of international law, to stop any military flights to Israel.

"Israel's genocide against the Palestinian people must not be enabled by Spanish land and labor," she said.

However, the Spanish Foreign Ministry said that officials "[have] not authorized any transit through Spanish airports of defense material destined for Israel," adding that "no arms sales operations to Israel have been authorized either."

In December, a media report revealed that Washington sent over a thousand tons of ammunition to Israel on a ship that docked at a US naval base in Spain.

"Shipments through American military bases in Spain of military materials, which may be used in the commission of international crimes, are harder to detect," Spanish lawmaker Enrique Santiago back then said.

Hamas Hands Over Bodies of Four Israeli Captives, Six Captives to Be Released Saturday



Members of the Al-Qassam Brigades secure an area before handing over the bodies of the Bibas family (three members) and Oded Lifshitz to the Red Cross teams in Khan Yunis Governorate, the Gaza Strip on February 20, 2025.

GAZA (Dispatches) – Hamas on Thursday released the bodies of four Israeli captives, including a mother and her two children of the Bibas family, in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians to be released later this week.

Hamas leader Khalil al-Hayya announced the release of the four bodies on Tuesday, adding that another six living captives, including Hisham al-Sayed and Avera Mengistu who have been detained in Gaza since 2014, are expected to be released this Saturday.

Shiri Bibas and her two children, Kfir and Ariel, were reportedly killed in an air strike in November 2023, according to Hamas. Yarden Bibas, Shiri's husband, was released last month during phase one of the ceasefire deal.

Hamas, however, said on Friday the remains of Shiri Bibas appear to have been mixed with other human remains from the rubble after an Israeli air strike hit the place she was held in.

A total of 1,135 Palestinian prisoners have been freed from Israeli prisons so far. On Saturday, Israel is set to release hundreds more Palestinians, expected to be women and minors detained by Zionist troops in Gaza during the war.

Another 602 prisoners are expected to be freed in the coming two weeks, bringing the total number of released Palestinians under the first phase to 1,737.

Meanwhile, Gaza's Government

Media Office accused the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of "double standards" regarding the handover of the bodies of deceased Israelis and Palestinians, Anadolu reported.

"While the Red Cross holds solemn official ceremonies when receiving the bodies of Israeli captives, it delivers the bodies of Palestinian martyrs in blue bags tossed into trucks that lack the most basic elements of human dignity," Ismail Thawabta, who heads the media office, said on X.

"This blatant discrimination reflects double standards and exposes the international community's failure to achieve justice and fairness!"

The ceasefire deal took effect last month, pausing Israel's genocidal war, which has killed at least 48,300 people, mostly women and children, and left the enclave in ruins.

In November 2024, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Zionist prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former war minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

The Zionist regime also faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice for its war on the enclave.

As part of the ceasefire agreement between Hamas and the occupying regime, an increase in humanitarian aid and equipment into Gaza must also be facilitated.

Starbucks Posts Loss of \$15.1mn in Malaysia Amid Gaza War Boycott

GAZA (Dispatches) – Starbucks' Malaysian operator, Berjaya Food, reported a loss of 67 million Malaysian ringgit (\$15.1 million) over the last six months of 2024, according to company figures released on Thursday.

Revenue for the period dropped 46% to \$55.6 million compared to the same timeframe in the previous year.

Berjaya Food's stock price also plummeted by 34.62% over the past six months.

As of June 30, 2024, the company operated 408 Starbucks outlets across Malaysia, according to its financial report.

"The lower revenue and higher loss from operations in the current quarter under review were mainly attributed to the prolonged impact of the ongoing sentiment related to the Middle East conflict," the company stated in its quarterly report released Thursday.

Last year, Starbucks Malaysia temporarily shut down more than

100 outlets as part of a strategic review aimed at optimizing its operations.

The boycott of U.S.-based food chains continues in response to the Zionist regime's war in Gaza, with multiple targeted companies worldwide reporting financial losses.

A ceasefire has been in place in Gaza since last month, temporarily halting the regime's genocidal war, which has resulted in the deaths of at least 48,300 people, mostly women and children, and left the enclave in devastation.

In November, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Zionist prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former war minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.

The regime is also facing a genocide case at the International Court of Justice over its actions in the region.