

Hizbullah claims to have Israeli target list

AFP, Beirut

Hizbullah stands ready for a showdown with Israel and knows what to target in the event of another conflict...

"We now hold a large and precise bank of Israeli targets, and Israel will have to pay the price for any step it takes," Qassem told the mass-circulation daily An-Nahar.

"Hizbullah has worked to develop its readiness to rise to the challenge should it arise, and we can safely say that in the past four years we have prepared ourselves far more than Israel has," he told the Arabic-language daily which is close to a parliamentary alliance that rivals Hizbullah.

"But that does not mean that war is near," Qassem added.

The last deadly war between Hizbullah and Israel was triggered by the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by the Shia militant group in a cross-border raid on July 12, 2006.

Israel defends right to raid aid ships

AFP, Geneva

Israel defended during a hearing of the UN Human Rights Committee yesterday its right to retaliate against aid ships attempting to breach its blockade of the impoverished Gaza Strip.

"No ship can breach this blockade, be they civil or military ships. Whoever violates the blockade is heading for retaliation," Israeli envoy Sari Rubenstein told the committee.

"The blockade is legitimate, under international law... a blockade can be imposed on the sea," she insisted, during the two-day committee hearing on how Israel was applying its obligations under the UN treaty on civil and political rights.

Israel came under pressure after the deadly storming of aid ships bound for Gaza at the end of May. A Libyan aid ship is currently on its way for Gaza, although it is being shadowed by several Israeli warships.

Defending May's military operation, Israeli ambassador Aharon Leshno Yaar claimed that "of the nine dead, seven had said they wished to die onboard these ships.

People on the aid ship say that Israeli forces opened fire as soon as they stormed the vessel, while Israel says its troops were attacked by those on the boat, forcing them to use deadly force.

"These are not activists for peace, but mes-

sengers of death," the ambassador charged on the second day of the UN committee session.

The committee had attacked Israel for failing to apply its obligations under a treaty on civil and political rights on the occupied Palestinian territories.

The UN says Israel is responsible for Gaza's 1.5 million population as it controls access to its sea and air ports, while Israel insists it is not the occupying power as it does not control territory within the Gaza Strip.

"I think that we cannot sweep aside with a stroke of the hand the application of the treaty in the Palestinian territories," said a member of the committee, Christine Chanet.

Israel invaded the Gaza Strip in 1967 and occupied it until 2005. Hamas won parliamentary elections in 2006, since when Israel has blockaded access by sea and air to the impoverished territory.

Rafah in Egypt, the only crossing into Gaza not controlled by Israel, remains largely closed as its opening requires the presence of Palestinian Authority officials who were ejected by Hamas in 2007.

Israeli attorney general Malkiel Blass argued however that given the rise of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and Israel's withdrawal of its forces from the zone, "Israel can clearly not be said to have effective control in the Gaza Strip."



A Palestinian youth holds a poster of Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi (R) and that of his son Saif al-Islam, during a rally in support of a Libyan aid ship threatening to run the Israeli Gaza blockade and reaching the Gaza Strip yesterday.



Pedestrians walk under the beams of a collapsed crane brought down by strong winds from Typhoon Conson at the South Luzon Expressway in Paranaque city, south of Manila, Philippines yesterday.

20 dead as typhoon smashes Philippines

AFP, Manila

Typhoon Conson ripped across the Philippines yesterday, killing at least 20 people as it destroyed shanty towns and caused widespread blackouts that brought the nation's capital to a standstill.

Sixty other people were reported missing after Conson hit the Southeast Asian archipelago late on Tuesday, then whipped the main island of Luzon throughout the night with wind gusts of 120 kilometres (74 miles) an hour.

"The wind howled like a child screaming," said Rigor Sambol, 52, a father of six who lives in a coastal shanty town on the outskirts of Manila that was partly destroyed.

"It was so strong, our houseboat nearly got flipped over. I had to take the children one by one to a nearby gym where they spent the evening on the cold floor."

Some of the flimsy slum homes erected by

squatters along the coast were swept away entirely, leaving the shocked residents to scavenge scrap wood to build makeshift shelters, according to an AFP reporter there.

Authorities across Luzon said 20 people had been confirmed killed, including two squatters from a vast lakeside shanty town near Manila who were crushed when their homes collapsed.

Fifty-seven fishermen were also missing, while three other people were unaccounted for south of the capital after flooding swept away their shanties, according to the military.

The Philippines is in the so-called typhoon belt of the Pacific. Up to 20 typhoons sweep through the country each year, killing hundreds of people.

But the ferocity of Conson, which was the first typhoon of the season, took many people in Manila by surprise after the state weather service said it would only strike provinces to the north of the capital.

Saudi to restart flights to Iraq

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi airline Alwafeer will begin regular flights to Iraq this week, some 20 years after the kingdom stopped flights following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, an airline official said yesterday.

Jeddah-based Alwafeer, launched last year as mainly a carrier for Muslim pilgrims coming to Saudi Arabia, will make its inaugural flight to Basra today, said marketing director Saleh Bogary.

"Tomorrow is our first flight," Bogary told AFP. "And then Saturday and Monday to Baghdad, and Tuesday again to Basra," he said.

Bogary said that in addition to the four flights a week planned now, the company hopes to add a weekly flight to Suleimaniya in a few weeks.

When it launched last September, privately owned Alwafeer focussed on charter flights carrying Muslim pilgrims to Jeddah -- the main gateway to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina -- from Niger, Chad, Libya and India.

But more recently the carrier, which operates three 450-seat Boeing 747s, has opened a weekly flight to Jakarta carrying all types of passengers, and received government permission to begin flying to Iraq.

Speaker worried

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He also mentioned a number of measures that are underway to ensure security of the MP hostel.

At this point, Chief Whip Abdus Shahid said notices were served earlier requesting some lawmakers not to allow their aides to stay at the hostel.

But they did not cooperate, he alleged.

"I am ashamed to say that drivers and personal secretaries of some ministers and MPs are living at the MP hostel although they got government residence to live in," Shahid said.

In a prompt response, the speaker said the rules and regulations do not allow anyone other than lawmakers and ministers or their family members to live there.

The chief whip said the House committee has already decided to evacuate illegal dwellers from the hostel.

The speaker said if a minister or MP does not stay at the MP hostel and only uses its room for meeting purpose, he should lock the room after holding the meeting.

Abdul Hamid said there are some rooms at the MP hostel where unwanted people are living, causing many untoward incidents.

He said no lawmaker and minister should allow their aides to stay there, even if he or his family members do not live there.

HSC results

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to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by the education minister.

A press conference will be held at 12 noon at education ministry conference hall.

On April 1, a total of 7,36,373 students sat for the examinations, of which 4,00,464 were males while 3,35,909 females. The number of exam centres was 2,037. The exams were also held in five overseas centres in Jeddah, Riyadh, Qatar, Abu Dhabi and Tripoli for a total of 146 candidates.

In comparison to last year, 1,14,150 more students appeared in the exams this year.

CCC polls

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number of voters who voted for M Manzur Alam, who was unofficially a BNP candidate, still believe the government has been performing satisfactorily. This may also indicate a huge swing in voters.

These patterns came out in a survey on the recently-concluded election by Nielsen Bangladesh on over 2,500 voters in all the 41 wards of CCC.

Ninety-five percent said they did not face any problem or irregularities in casting votes.

Iran nuke scientist Amiri 'heading home'

BBC ONLINE

An Iranian nuclear scientist who claims he was abducted by CIA agents last year and taken to the US is on his way back to Tehran, Iran says.

Foreign Ministry officials, who claim they have evidence Shahram Amiri was kidnapped, told state media he had now left the US.

The US state department has insisted he was in the US of his own free will.

In June, Mr Amiri appeared in three videos giving conflicting stories about how he had arrived in the US.

On Monday evening Mr Amiri arrived at the Iranian Interests Section of the Pakistani embassy in Washington, which handles Iranian affairs in the US capital, and asked to be repatriated.

Since then, he has renewed his allegations that he was kidnapped, giving more details to the Iranian media.

But in the US, unnamed officials and security sources are claiming that Mr Amiri defected and was put into a kind of witness-protection programme.

3 policemen killed in 'Qaeda' attacks in south Yemen

AFP, Sana'a

Suspected al-Qaeda gunmen launched simultaneous attacks yesterday on the intelligence and security services headquarters in the south Yemen town of Zinjibar, killing three policemen and wounding 11, a security official said.

Two gunmen were killed and one wounded in the clashes, the official added.

He said that around 20 gunmen carried out the attacks, and that al-Qaeda was believed to be responsible.

The defence ministry's 26sep.net news website reported that "more than 20 terrorists from the al-Qaeda organisation" were involved, citing local sources.

Witnesses said gunmen on motorbikes armed with rocket-propelled grenades, assault

rifles and grenades began attacking the two headquarters at around 8:00 am (0500 GMT).

26sep.net said the gunmen attacked the intelligence headquarters from a nearby girls' school. Seven of the attackers were arrested, it said, citing the local sources.

Security forces also seized a car used by the gunmen, which contained military uniforms, suicide belts filled with explosives and other weapons and gear, the website added.

After a fierce gunbattle, the attackers fled toward Jaar, north of Zinjibar, witnesses said.

Two policemen were killed at the security services headquarters and a third at the intelligence headquarters, the security official said, adding that police have one dead attacker's body while the surviving gunmen took the other.

Undue facilities

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She said land developers were not made to use land properly. Therefore, they indiscriminately use land to construct buildings, which presented them with the opportunity to speak in such a way.

"Now, we want to put an end to this and ensure planned use of lands. That is why, they [land developers] are using offensive language against the state minister as he boldly stood against them," Hasina said.

On implementation of DAP, which reserves 21 percent of the capital's land as water bodies where no development will be permitted, the premier said nobody will be affected due to the implementation of DAP.

"But I am aware that, in some places people are being intentionally provoked [against DAP] and problems are being created," Hasina said without citing the recent unrest in Gazipur over construction of a satellite town there.

Speaker Abdul Hamid, who was presiding over the sitting at that time, drew the premier's attention to the anomalies in approving building designs.

In response, Hasina said proper actions would certainly be taken in time.

The premier also informed the parliament about the government's various measures including introduction of land zoning, preparing digital land zoning map and village development laws to save and ensure planned use of farmland.

Mentioning that the indiscriminate use of land is decreasing cultivable land, Hasina said future food security will be in jeopardy and it will be difficult to meet the demand of food for the growing population if the situation continues.

She said her government has also moved to amend national housing policy so that none can launch housing projects on farmlands.

The premier also dwelt on the prospect of bringing back the golden era of jute following the decoding genome of jute plants.

On declaration of eighth wage board for newspaper industries, Hasina said her government would consider it when the time is right, if necessary.

She also informed the House about her government's plans and ongoing programmes to ensure health service to people and set up international and domestic airports to boost the country's economy.

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