

## International

Friday, December 14, 2018

# Israel locks down Ramallah after two soldiers shot dead

## Baby boy laid to rest in Jerusalem after attack

**RAMALLAH, Palestinian Territories:** A Palestinian shot dead two Israeli soldiers at a bus stop in the occupied West Bank on yesterday, the military said, with the army locking down the city of Ramallah amid a manhunt. The attack came hours after security forces killed two Palestinian murder suspects, with fears of wider unrest. In another incident, a Palestinian stabbed two Israeli border police in Jerusalem's Old City before being shot dead, in the bloodiest 24 hours to hit the West Bank and Jerusalem in months.

The Israeli army said a Palestinian exited his car at a bus stop near the Ofra settlement in the West Bank before opening fire on soldiers and civilians. Two soldiers were killed and at least two other people—including another soldier—were wounded, the army said, with the attacker fleeing. An AFP photographer saw two men who appeared to be soldiers lying on the ground, before their bodies were covered up. “We are searching for the terrorist. We will find him,” the military said on Twitter.

Following the attack, the army circled the nearby city of Ramallah, home to Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas. Entrances and exits to the city were sealed and the army entered multiple neighborhoods, AFP correspondents said. Clashes broke out in multiple spots.

## US-backed Syrian forces smash IS defenses in east

**BEIRUT;** Kurdish-led forces yesterday moved deep into Hajin, the main village in the last pocket still held by the Islamic State group in eastern Syria, a war monitor said. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), with support from air strikes conducted by the US-led coalition, deployed across the Euphrates Valley village. “The SDF managed to break the defenses of the Islamic State group after massing a large number of fighters backed by the international coalition,” the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

“They achieved quick progress inside Hajin, the largest of the villages that were controlled by IS,” Rami Abdel Rahman, the head of the Britain-based monitoring organization, said. The SDF said on social media they had “liberated the city centre of Hajin and the big mosque”. Hajin lies on the east

### Hamas claim

The shooting came only hours after Israeli forces killed two militants allegedly responsible for West Bank attacks that claimed the lives of three Israelis, including a baby. The armed wing of Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, which has fought three wars with Israel in Gaza since 2008, claimed the two Palestinians as its “fighters.” One of them was Salah Barghouti, a 29-year-old accused of shooting seven Israelis on Sunday, also at a bus stop near the Ofra settlement.

The Shin Bet Israeli internal security service said that other members of Barghouti's group, all of them affiliated with Hamas, had been arrested overnight. A woman who was seven months pregnant was among those wounded in that attack. Doctors

tried to save her baby boy with an emergency caesarean but he died on Wednesday and was laid to rest in Jerusalem.

The mother remains in hospital in a serious condition. The other Palestinian killed by Israeli forces on Wednesday night had been suspected of shooting dead two Israelis in October. Ashraf Naalwa, 23, was killed when forces tried to arrest him near Nablus in the West Bank, Israel's Shin Bet security service said.

### Peppered with bullets

The house near Nablus where Naalwa was found was peppered with bullet holes after the

bank of the Euphrates in the eastern province of Deir Ezzor, about 30 kilometers from the border with Iraq. The area held by IS is sometimes referred to as the “Hajin pocket”, the last rump of a once-sprawling “caliphate” the group proclaimed in 2014 over parts of Syria and Iraq.

The SDF Kurdish-Arab alliance launched an operation in September to flush out IS but their advance has been fraught with obstacles. The push to retake Hajin was delayed by Turkish threats on Kurdish heartlands further north and deadly counter-attacks by die-hard jihadists making a bloody last stand. “Now IS is confined to tunnels and to the edges of town,” Abdel Rahman said. “Fighting on the ground and air strikes are continuing. The mines planted by the jihadists are the main remaining obstacle,” he said.

No casualty toll was immediately available for the latest fighting but according to the Observatory close to 500 SDF fighters have been killed since the start of the operation on September 10. Around 300 civilians have also been killed, many of them in coalition air strikes, and thousands have been forced to flee their homes. —AFP



**JERUSALEM:** Relatives of Israeli couple Amichai and Shira Ish-Ran attend the funeral of their baby, who died after being delivered prematurely due to Shira being wounded in a drive-by shooting attack by a Palestinian man, at the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives in front of Jerusalem's Old City. —AFP

raid, an AFP journalist at the scene said. On October 7, Naalwa allegedly shot and killed 28-year-old Kim Yehezkel and 35-year-old Ziv Hagbi in the Barkan industrial zone settlement. The two Israelis were employees of the recycling company where Naalwa worked. A separate incident on Thursday morning saw a man stab two border police in Jerusalem's Old City before being shot dead.

There were no immediate details on the identity of the assailant. The violence came amid heightened tensions in the West Bank, with a former head of Shin Bet's intelligence and research division saying it appeared to be a “new front” opened by Hamas. “It is a part of the new initiative of (Hamas) that decided to open a new front

in the West Bank after a period of time that they got to the conclusion they will ease down their efforts from the Gaza Strip,” Barak Ben-Zur said.

Since Sunday's attack, Israeli forces have made a series of incursions into central Ramallah, where Abbas's Palestinian Authority is based. Hebrew posters have been pasted in the West Bank over the past week inciting the killing of Abbas. Israel seized control of the West Bank and east Jerusalem in a 1967 war. Around 600,000 Israelis now live in settlements there considered illegal by the international community. Many Palestinians consider violence against Israelis in the West Bank a justified response to the growth of settlements on land they see as theirs. —AFP

## 21 IS militants escape Iraqi jail, most recaptured

**BAGHDAD:** Twenty one prisoners, most of them members of Islamic State jailed on terrorism charges, broke out of a prison in northern Iraq but 15 of them have been recaptured, Kurdish security officials said yesterday. The fortified jail of Sosa is located near the Iraqi Kurdish city of Sulaimaniya and include mainly militants of the hardline Islamist group who were captured during the fight against Islamic State which started in 2014.

Kurdish security officials launched manhunt operations after the break-out late on Wednesday and 15 of the 21

were recaptured, two security officials said. The whereabouts of the other six remains unknown.

Although Sosa jail is located in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq, the federal government has full control over the prison. “Almost all of the convicted inmates who escaped are from Daesh,” said one Kurdish security source. Daesh is an Arabic acronym for Islamic State.

It was not clear how the inmates managed to escape the highly secured prison. Islamic State, which once occupied a third of Iraq's territory, has been largely defeated in the country but still poses a threat along the border with Syria. The group has resorted to guerrilla tactics since it abandoned its goal of holding territory and creating a self-sufficient caliphate that straddles Iraq and Syria.—Reuters