

Lebanese Army nabs Taha, three other Fatah al-Islam men trying to enter Beddawi camp

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BEIRUT: One day after capturing Fatah al-Islam spokesman Abu Salim Taha and three other fugitive militants, the Lebanese Army on Sunday nabbed three more members of Fatah al-Islam near the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp, said a report by Agence France Presse (AFP).

Also on Sunday, State Prosecutor Said Mirza confirmed that the wife of Fatah al-Islam leader Shaker al-Abssi had said she "might have been mistaken" in identifying the corpse of a militant as her husband, said the AFP report. DNA tests proved the corpse belonged to a man in his 30s, while Abssi was born in 1955.

Among the three militants snared on Sunday were two citizens of unidentified Gulf countries and 25-year-old Syrian national Abdul-Aziz al-Masri, who was captured in Miniyeh, said a report from the National News Agency (NNA). Masri was taking shelter near the Mediterranean Sea and he was carrying cans of tuna and vitamin pills when authorities apprehended him, the NNA report added.

Taha - whose real name according to the army is Mohammad Saleh Zawawi - was arrested on Saturday when he and three comrades attempted to sneak into the Beddawi refugee camp south of Nahr al-Bared, said local media reports. Taha is a Palestinian-Syrian from the Yarmouk refugee camp, while his cohorts were from Saudi Arabia, Syria and Tunisia, the reports said.

Lebanese security forces have been guarding the perimeter of the Beddawi camp since the siege of Nahr al-Bared ended with a failed mass breakout by the last few dozen remaining Fatah al-Islam militants on September 2. The army has rounded up and killed almost 20 gunmen since then, after killing 39 and capturing 21 during the escape try. The army lost 167 soldiers in the 15-week battle, while killing more than 220 militants and taking more than 200 into custody.

However, the army had had little success in finding or killing Fatah al-Islam's leadership before collaring Taha on Saturday. Security forces shot and killed Fatah al-Islam number two Shehab Qaddour, known as Abu Hureira, in mid-August in the port city of Tripoli after he had somehow slipped out of the besieged Nahr al-Bared camp.

The whereabouts of Abssi and spokesman Shahine Shahine remain unknown. Mirza has said that Abssi had bolted Nahr al-Bared a few hours before the abortive pre-dawn mass getaway bid on September 2.

Abssi's wife, daughter and a number of Palestinian clerics positively identified a corpse in a Tripoli hospital as Abssi, although Abssi's wife conceded to Investigating Magistrate Ghassan Oweidat that the body might not have been her husband, the AFP report said.

The judge plans to question the clerics again, and all those who mistakenly identified the corpse could face charges of giving false information if authorities believe the witnesses intentionally misled the investigation. - With agencies

By Michael Bluhm, Daily Star staff
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Two Syrian Fatah al-Islam Terrorists Rounded Up

Lebanese citizens and military intelligence agents have captured two Syrian members of the Fatah al-Islam terrorist network in the range groves of north Lebanon.

The arrests were made Sunday in the Minieh district close to the Nahr al-Bared camp that had been the field for a 106-day confrontation between the army and Fatah al-Islam terrorists.

Minieh residents in cooperation with police captured Abdul Aziz al-Masri, a Syrian national and member of Fatah a-Islam who was hiding in an orange grove near the beach.

Army intelligence, later Sunday, arrested another Syrian terrorist who was identified as Nouri al-Hajeh.

A military source said the army has arrested at least 30 Fatah al-Islam terrorists and killed 20 since the Nahr al-Bared battle was won on Sept 2.

That brought to nearly 250 the number of Fatah al-Islam terrorists killed since outbreak of hostilities on May 20.

Authorities have also captured more than 240 members of the group. However, Mystery still shrouds the whereabouts of terrorist master mind Shaker Abssi.

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