

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان ها اروپایی

Al Jazeera

Gunfights in Lebanon amid simmering tension

Sunni and Shia groups clash, while the army vows to act firmly to curb violence.

10/22/2012



Lebanon's army says Lebanon is in critical phase and pledges to act firmly

Gunfights have broken out in several areas of Lebanon following the funeral of the senior intelligence official, Wissam al-Hassan on Sunday.

At least three people were killed as Sunni and Shia gunmen exchanged fire on Sunday night.

On Monday, clashes between Lebanese troops and unidentified armed men took place in the Sunni district of Beirut, the capital, according to the AFP news agency.

Soldiers responded after they came under fire as they tried to re-open a road to Tariq Jdideh, a Sunni Muslim district that neighbors Shia Muslim suburbs in the south of the capital, Beirut.

Al Jazeera's Nisreen El Shamaylah reporting from Beirut said the army was deployed in the area following the clashes, vowing to restore order.

Army warning

The army warned that targeting public or private institutions crossed a "red line", and it would respond.

"The last few hours have proven without a doubt that the country is going through a decisive and critical time and the level of tension in some regions is rising to unprecedented levels," a statement issued by the army leadership said on Monday.

"We call on all political leaders to be cautious when expressing their stances and opinions... because the fate of the country is on the line", the strongly worded statement said.

While pledging to leave politicians to find a political solution to the crisis triggered by Friday's assassination of Brigadier General Wissam al-Hassan, the army also pledged "to stamp out any security violation and safeguard national peace".

"The army leadership reiterates, by action not words, that security is a red line, and likewise the targeting of official institutions and violation of private and public property," it said.

Residents had earlier reported heavy overnight gunfire around Tariq al-Jadida between gunmen armed with rifles and rocket-propelled grenades.

Protesters overnight blocked roads in Beirut with burning tyres, including the highway to the airport.

The capital was noticeably quieter than normal on Monday.

Many people stayed home for fear of violence and streets were free of the usual traffic chaos.

Al-Hassan, a Sunni, was killed by a car bomb in the capital on Friday. He was the head of the intelligence branch of the Internal Security Forces and an outspoken critic of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The blast occurred in the mainly Christian district of Ashrafiya, in a busy street close to the headquarters of Hariri's 14 March coalition.

Tension prevails

Thousands of people attended al-Hassan's state funeral in Beirut, which rapidly became a political rally against both Lebanese Prime Minister Mikati and Syria.

Many politicians have accused Syria of being behind the killing and angry protesters tried to storm the government palace after al-Hassan's funeral on Sunday.

Opposition leaders and their supporters want Prime Minister Mikati to resign, saying he is too close to al-Assad and his Lebanese ally Hezbollah, which is part of Mikati's government.

Mikati did offer to stand down on Saturday, but President Michel Suleiman asked him to stay on in the national interest.

Memories are still vivid in Lebanon of the death and destruction of Lebanon's 1975-90 civil war. Heavily-armed soldiers and police were out in force at street junctions and government buildings.

Opposition leaders have urged their supporters to refrain from any more violence.

"We want peace, the government should fall, but we want that in a peaceful way. I call on all those who are in the streets to pull back," former prime minister Saad al-Hariri said on the Future Television channel on Sunday evening.