

Abducted priest handed over to Hezbollah official

By Rakan al-Fakih

BAALBEK, Lebanon: A priest was released Monday night and delivered to the head of Hezbollah's Shura Council Sheikh Mohammad Yazbek a few hours after being snatched at gunpoint on the Ansar road in the Bekaa Valley district of Baalbek, security sources told The Daily Star.

Initial security reports had said that unidentified individuals riding two black Jeep Cherokees accosted Father Walid Gharious at 5 p.m. on the Ansar road in Baalbek and abducted him, taking him to an unknown location.

Sources said that the atmosphere became very tense in Baalbek after Gharious was kidnapped over an issue regarding a young woman named Banin Qataya, who is the daughter of a Shiite cleric in the region.

According to the sources, the kidnappers believed Gharious knew the whereabouts of Qataya, who had converted to Christianity and left her parents' house almost three years ago after falling victim to torture and mistreatment over her conversion.