

WASHINGTON (Al Jazeera) – A Syrian cinematographer who worked on an Oscar-nominated documentary has been barred from entering the United States to attend Sunday's Academy Awards ceremony. Despite being granted a U.S. visa, Khaled Khatib, 21 - who documented Syria's civil war in the film *The White Helmets* - was scheduled to depart from the Turkish city of Istanbul on Saturday before U.S. officials reportedly discovered "derogatory information" about him.

Knowledge is inheritance of Prophets while wealth is inheritance of Firauns (Pharaohs).

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Iraqi Forces Gain More Grounds in Western Mosul



Iraqi forces advance on February 23, 2017 towards Mosul airport on the southern edge of the city of Mosul prior to entering the airport compound for the first time since the Daesh terrorist group overran the region in 2014.

BAGHDAD (Reuters) – Iraqi forces pushed deeper into western Mosul on Saturday, advancing in several populated southern districts after punching through the defenses of Daesh terrorist group's last major urban stronghold in Iraq a day earlier.

About 1,000 civilians also walked across the frontlines, the largest movement since the new

offensive launched last week to deal the ultra-hardline terror group a decisive blow.

In the capital Baghdad, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir met Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on Saturday in the first such visit in more than a decade between Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

The new push in Mosul comes after government forces and their

allies finished clearing Daesh from the east of the northern Iraqi city last month, confining the insurgents to the western sector on the other side of the Tigris river.

Commanders expect the battle in western Mosul to be more difficult, in part because tanks and armored vehicles cannot pass through the narrow alleyways that crisscross ancient districts

there.

But Iraqi forces have so far made quick advances on multiple fronts, capturing the northern city's airport on Thursday, which they plan to use as a support zone, and breaching a three-meter high berm and trench set up by the terrorists group.

The advancing forces are less than three kilometers (two miles) from the mosque in the old city where Daesh leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared a caliphate spanning Iraq and Syria in 2014, sparking an international military campaign to defeat the group.

Losing Mosul would likely deal a hammer blow to the terrorists' dream of statehood, but they still control swathes of territory in Syria and patches of northern and western Iraq from where they could fight a guerrilla-style insurgency in Iraq, and plot attacks on the West.

Federal police and an elite Interior Ministry unit known as Rapid Response have recaptured Hawi al-Josaq along the river and begun clearing the Tayyaran district north of the airport, said Brigadier General Hisham Abdul Kadhim.

Daesh resisted with snipers and roadside bombs, he said. A Reuters correspondent saw the corpses of two terrorists outside a mosque in Josaq.

Amid Push to Dispatch More Troops Top U.S. General Secretly Visits Syria

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – U.S. General Joseph Votel, the commander of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), has secretly headed to northern Syria to meet U.S.-backed terrorist groups, two days after announcing that Washington was mulling more U.S. boots on the ground in the Arab country.

Votel, who oversees the U.S.-led military operations against alleged Daesh targets in Iraq and Syria, visited the frontline cities of Kobani and Raqqah and met with commanders of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militants.

According to Talal Sello, a spokesman for the SDF, Votel discussed the terrorist group's Raqqah offensive and the possible ways to expand coordination and support during the hours-long meeting.

The SDF launched its campaign to capture Raqqah in November 2016 and took control of some areas up the Euphrates Valley. The group enjoys air support from the U.S.-led coalition, which has been conducting airstrikes in Syria since 2014.

Votel has also discussed the situation in Raqqah with Turkish officials, who are unhappy with Washington's ties with the SDF and have reportedly offered alternative plans to capture the terrorist-riddled city without the group's involvement.

Nearly two-thirds of the 30,000 SDF members belong to the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), which Ankara considers a

"terrorist" group.

Meanwhile, as the diplomatic efforts aimed at finding a solution to Syria's conflict get momentum, the United Nations has welcomed the Syrian warring sides' readiness to "sit down in one room."

Michael Contet, the acting chief of staff of UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura, made the remarks at a press conference at the end of the second day of a new round of talks at the UN headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

He noted that de Mistura was "satisfied that in a short space of time the parties have shown their readiness to sit in one room and he has had the opportunity for some initial in-depth exchanges."

Content added that the special envoy, however, believed that the negotiations would be a difficult and lengthy process that an "early public breakthrough should not be expected."

During the previous rounds of talks held in Geneva, the two parties never negotiated directly and only communicated via de Mistura.

The UN-brokered intra-Syrian talks come shortly after the conclusion of the second round of the Syria peace negotiations, facilitated by Russia, Turkey and Iran, in the Kazakh capital of Astana on February 15 and 16. The negotiations, which were held in a closed-door setting, sought to pave the way for the negotiations in Geneva.

Zionist Troops Clash With Palestinian Protesters



Palestinian protesters carry tires during a weekly demonstration against the expropriation of Palestinian land by the Zionist regime in the town of Kfar Qaddum, near Nablus, in the occupied West Bank on February 24, 2017.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime's troops have clashed with hundreds of Palestinian protesters on the anniversary of a 1994 massacre carried out by a far-right Jewish settler in the southern part of the occupied West Bank.

Violence broke out in the city of al-Khalil, located 30 kilometers south of al-Quds, as Palestinian youths hurled rocks at Zionist troops, who fired tear gas canisters and sound grenades to disperse the crowd as cannons doused the demonstrators with stinking water. There were no reports of injuries and arrests.

On February 25, 1994, at least 29 Palestinians were killed and 125 others wounded when American-Israeli Baruch Goldstein opened fire on a large number of Palestinian Muslims, who had gathered inside the Ibrahim Mosque to say prayers during the holy fasting month of Ramadan.

Also on Friday, dozens of Palestinians staged a protest in al-Khalil against U.S. President Donald Trump, who has voiced strong support for the Zionist regime. The protesters pelted a huge portrait of the businessman-turned-politician with shoes.

"This is a Palestinian product.

He will get it in his face. He and everybody supporting him," activist Issa Amro said.

He added, "Today we are here to send the message to the Trump administration that we exist; we deserve full rights as everybody in the world. We have no respect for this president, who does not see us as equal human beings with everyone."

Elsewhere, in the West Bank town of Abu Dis, clashes erupted between Zionist troops and Palestinian stone-throwers protesting against the controversial separation wall that snakes across the occupied West Bank, isolating large swathes of Palestinian territories.

Palestinian protesters also burnt tires during a weekly demonstration against the expropriation of Palestinian land by the regime in the northern West Bank town of Kfar Qaddum, located 13 kilometers west of Nablus.

The occupied Palestinian territories have witnessed tensions ever since the occupying regime imposed restrictions on the entry of Palestinian worshippers into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East al-Quds in August 2015.

Nearly 280 Palestinians have lost their lives at the hands of Zionist troops since the beginning of October that year.

'Yemeni Forces Target Jordanian F-16 Fighter Jet Over Saudi Arabia'

SANAA (Dispatches) – Yemeni air defense forces, backed by fighters from allied Popular Committees, have reportedly intercepted and shot down a single-engine, supersonic and multirole F-16 fighter jet of the Royal Jordanian Air Force.

An unnamed Yemeni military source told Arabic-language al-Masirah television network that the aircraft was targeted as it was flying in the skies over Saudi Arabia's southwestern border region of Najran earlier in the day.

It had purportedly taken part in the Saudi-led military coalition strikes against Yemen.

This is while the General Command of Jordanian Armed Forces confirmed in a statement that one of its fighter jets had gone down inside Saudi Arabia, without providing any information about the cause of the crash.

The statement added that the pilot, identified as Adnan Naeem Abdulaziz Nabas, managed to eject before the plane crash. The Jordanian pilot will reportedly return to Jordan this evening in coordination with the Saudi air force.

Meanwhile, the United Arab Emirates official news agency,



Yemenis prepare to bury a victim of a Saudi air raid that hit a funeral reception in the Arhab district, located 40 kilometers north of the capital Sana'a, on February 16, 2017.

WAM, reported that an Emirati soldier has been killed while fighting in Yemen as part of the Saudi-led military coalition.

The report identified the slain trooper as Khalid Ali Ghareeb al-Balushi.

The development came only two days after the commander of Emirati troops in Yemen, Brigadier Nasser Mushabab al-Otaibi, was killed after Yemeni forces fired a medium-range ballistic missile at a gathering of Riyadh-backed militiamen loyal to the former government in the Red Sea port city of Mokha, situated 346 kilometers south of the capital, Sana'a.

The media bureau of the op-

erations command in Yemen announced on Wednesday that a host of Saudi mercenaries died and sustained injuries in the attack.

Arabic-language Here Aden news agency later reported that Major General Ahad Saif al-Yafei, the the second-in-command of the Saudi-backed military forces, had also been killed in the offensive.

Also on Friday noon, Yemeni soldiers and allied fighters fatally shot a Saudi soldier in Abadiyah military base of the kingdom's southwestern region of Jizan.

Hours later, Yemeni snipers shot dead another Saudi soldier in the Alib military base of Najran.