

Saudi Court Sentences Shia Activist to Death

RIYADH (Press TV) – A court in Saudi Arabia has handed down a death penalty to a Shia anti-regime activist as the Riyadh regime presses ahead with its brutal clampdown against members of the religious community.

On Wednesday, the Specialized Criminal Court in the capital Riyadh found the defendant, whose identity was not immediately available, guilty of “joining a terror group called Tarot Battalion to destabilize the kingdom’s internal security, targeting security personnel, carrying out acts of sabotage and chaos, obstructing roads, and involvement in divisive activities.”

On February 11, the same Saudi court sentenced a dissident to 20 years in jail on charges of throwing petrol bombs at the General Intelligence Building in Qatif, burning tires and preventing regime forces from reaching the site of anti-regime rallies.

The court also imposed a travel ban of similar period on the unidentified man.

Late last month, Saudi officials put on trial a pro-democracy campaigner and anti-regime activist without the presence of a defense lawyer and letting members of his family know about the trial session.

According to a report published by the Arabic-language *Khabir* online newspaper, Hussain al-Sadiq, who



Saudis march during a protest in the Eastern Province, against the execution of prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr by the Saudi regime.

has been held in jail for more than two years, was taken to the Specialized Criminal Court without informing his family.

Not having heard of their son for a while, they contacted the Criminal Investigation Department in the eastern city of Dammam, where they found Sadiq had

already been put on trial.

Saudi Arabia has lately stepped up politically-motivated arrests, prosecution, and conviction of peaceful dissident writers and human rights campaigners.

Saudi officials have also intensified security measures in the Shia-populated and oil-rich Eastern Province.

Eastern Province has been the scene of peaceful demonstrations since February 2011. Protesters have been demanding reforms, freedom of expression, the release of political prisoners, and an end to economic and religious discrimination against the oil-rich region.

Russia:

U.S., NATO Denial of Daesh in Afghanistan Worrying

MOSCOW (Dispatches) – Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has voiced worries over the U.S. and NATO’s denial of the presence of Daesh terrorists in Afghanistan.

“We are alarmed as unfortunately, the U.S. and NATO military in Afghanistan makes every effort to silence and deny the Daesh group’s presence in Afghanistan,” said Lavrov during a press conference in Moscow.

He added that Moscow is harboring suspicions towards the NATO coalition’s actions on curbing the threat of terrorists in Afghanistan.

“According to our data, the Daesh presence in northern and eastern Afghanistan is rather serious, there are already thousands of gunmen,” Lavrov said.

“This increases the risk of the terrorists’ penetration to Central Asia and it is not that difficult to get to Russia,” he added.

Earlier in the month, Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami said the U.S. is transferring Daesh to Afghanistan to justify its military presence in the Central Asian country following heavy blows dealt to the terrorist group in Syria and Iraq.

The Iranian defense minister also stressed that the U.S. created Daesh to use it in Syria and Iraq.

In December last year, Russian warned that an estimated 10,000 members of the Daesh terrorist group are currently present in Afghanistan, and that their number is growing due to the relocation of the terror outfit to the Central Asian country after territorial defeats in Syria and Iraq.

Daesh began establishing a presence in Afghanistan almost a year after making sweeping land grabs in Iraq and Syria in 2014.

The terrorist group took advantage of the ongoing chaos in Afghanistan and recruited some of its fighters from among Taliban defectors.

Back in 2014, the U.S.-led occupying forces in Afghanistan officially announced the end of their combat operations in the country, saying they now had a mission to “train, advise, and assist” Afghan troops.

However, the U.S. administration last year permitted the deployment of an additional 3,000 troops to Afghanistan, where the U.S. already has 11,000 forces.

Veteran ...

(Continued From Page One)

It also describes measures taken to minimize child casualties by Saudi forces as “largely ineffective”, in comments that are likely to prove embarrassing to officials in Westminster who have defended Saudi Arabia’s targeting process, and the continued sale of UK-made weapons.

Andrew Smith, the spokesman for Campaign Against Arms Trade, or CAAT, said the Saudi bombing campaign has created one of the “worst humanitarian crises in the world”.

“Thousands of people have been killed and vital infrastructure has been destroyed all across Yemen,” he said.

“If Boris Johnson is serious about ending the crisis, then he and his colleagues must stop arming and supporting the Saudi regime.”

In one case, the report’s authors found evidence that UK-made Paveway IV bombs were used in a series of strikes on an industrial complex in September 2016.

“There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the factory complex had become a legitimate military objective or that the Saudi Arabia-led coalition complied with IHL principles,” the report found.

Arms control experts say this is the first example of UK weapons being so directly linked to alleged breaches of international law by UN experts.

Oliver Feeley-Sprague, Amnesty International UK’s arms control director, told MEE: “There have already been a series of cases in Yemen where UK weaponry - including cluster munitions - sold to the Saudi Arabia-led coalition has been used in breach of international humanitarian law, but the UN report is a significant reminder to the UK government that its reckless arming of the coalition is not going unnoticed.”

“The UK should cease supplying weapons to all parties to this terrible conflict where there’s a risk those weapons could be used to carry out further human rights violations.”

Some ...

(Continued From Page One)

The twin-engined turboprop ATR 72 that crashed was more than 24 years old. According to data cited by the Flight Safety Foundation’s aviation-safety.net website, it was restored to service just three months ago after being in storage for six years.

More than 100 people demonstrated on Monday outside a local government office in nearby Dena Kooh county, demanding officials step down for their handling of the disaster after announcements that wreckage had been found on Monday were then denied.

Any individuals whose actions may have led to the crash will be confronted, Mahmoud Vaezi, the head of Iran’s presidency office, said Wednesday.

Iran has suffered several plane crashes in recent decades. Tehran blames U.S. sanctions for preventing it from importing new aircraft or spare parts.

A Boeing 727 crashed in northwest Iran in 2011, killing 78 people, and in 2009 all 168 people on board died when a Caspian Airlines Tupolev crashed en route for Armenia. In 2003 an Ilyushin-76 troop carrier crashed in southeast Iran, killing all 276 IRGC soldiers on board as well as crew.

A deal with world powers on Tehran’s nuclear program in 2015 opened the way for Iranian airlines to update their fleets but many older planes are still in service, particularly on domestic routes.

U.S. ...

(Continued From Page One)

However, global transaction network SWIFT reconnected Iranian banks to its system in early 2016, allowing them to resume cross-border transactions with foreign banks after the lifting of sanctions on Tehran.

The nuclear deal says non-U.S. banks may resume trading with Iran, but Washington especially under the Trump administration has been using a combination of scare tactics and a convoluted legal regime to discourage them from engaging with the Islamic Republic.

On Sunday, U.S. National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster openly called on the international community to reconsider business deals with Iran in spite of the international nuclear deal. He singled out Russia and China as Iran’s biggest trading partners, but also included Japan, South Korea and Germany.

The U.S. retains sanctions against Iran that predate the nuclear crisis and were imposed over other issues such as human rights. Hence, bankers are uncertain of the legal basis for business and worry they could still be targeted by U.S. officials.

Years of Washington’s scrutiny of European banks’ transactions with Iran have resulted in nearly a dozen enforcement cases which have extracted more than \$16 billion in fines for the U.S. government.

In May 2015, France’s largest bank BNP Paribas was ordered by a U.S. judge to pay a record \$8.9 billion fine over claims that it violated sanctions against Sudan, Cuba and Iran.

That focus is now turning to Asian banks, according to several former U.S. Treasury Department officials who specialize in sanctions work.

“The regulatory gaze and enforcement attention is facing east,” Bloomberg quoted Juan Zarate, a former Treasury Department and White House official, as saying.

Feed for Trump’s Case

According to the report, New York’s Department of Financial Services has taken action against several Asian banks in the last two years, including the Agricultural Bank of China, NongHyup Bank of South Korea and Mega International Commercial Bank of Taiwan.

In 2013 and 2014, Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ paid more than \$560 million in two settlements with New York banking regulators over its relationship with Iran, the report said.

Over the last year, the U.S. Treasury Department has blacklisted 20 people and entities in Asia for trade with Iran.

The newly-publicized cases are said to be in line with the Trump administration’s efforts to feed into the U.S. president’s claims that Iran cannot be trusted and his threats to scrap the nuclear agreement.

U.S. reports said on Monday that officials at the Trump administration were using a case against an Iranian airliner to thwart a multibillion-dollar deal between Boeing and flag carrier Iran Air for the sale of new passenger planes.

With his May deadline for a revision of the nuclear deal looming large, “administration officials indicated that he would oppose the deal”, the Jerusalem Post reported from Washington.

President ...

(Continued From Page 2)

President Rouhani also said Iran and the Netherlands have great potential to enhance their cooperation in different areas, including trade, banking, economy, energy and tourism.

The top Dutch diplomat, for her part, said Dutch companies are prepared to play a more active role in implementing projects in Iran.

Spanish FM in Tehran

Spanish Foreign Minister Alfonso Dastis expressed his country’s support for the Iran nuclear deal, and called for expansion of bilateral relations between Tehran and Madrid.

In a Wednesday meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif here, Dastis expressed his satisfaction with visiting Iran and added this is his first visit to the country.

“I hope I would make more visits to Iran in the future,” he noted.

Touching on the nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers, he added as a member of the European Union, Spain remains committed to the deal.

The Iranian foreign minister, for his part, referred to the longstanding relations between Tehran and Madrid, and called for expansion of relations between the two states in all fields.

The two top diplomats also called for expansion of cooperation between Iran and Spain in tourism, environment, energy, advanced technologies, transportation, and academic fields. They also exchanged views on regional developments.

At the end of the meeting, Zarif and Dastis signed memorandums of understanding to expand bilateral ties and political consultations. The railway officials of Iran and Spain also inked an MoU on development of cooperation in rail transportation.

Spanish foreign minister arrived in Iran on Tuesday at the head of a high-ranking politico-economic delegation for a two-day visit. He also held talks with President Rouhani on bilateral and regional issues.

Palestinian MP Suffers Brutal Torture in Zionist Regime’s Jail

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Palestinian Islamic resistance movement, Hamas, has roundly criticized the Tel Aviv regime for subjecting a lawmaker affiliated to the group to various forms of torture as he is being kept in Israeli jails without trial or charge.

Hamas, in a statement released on Wednesday, announced that 50-year-old Palestinian Legislative Council member Abdel Nasser Abdel-Jawad has been behind bars at the high securi-

ty Kishon (al-Jalameh) prison in northern West Bank for the past 50 days.

The statement added that the legislator has been “subjected to severe torture, pressure and threats since his arrest.”

Hamas noted that the Zionist regime’s military court has extended Abdel-Jawad’s detention several times “without allowing him to meet his lawyer.”

Abdel-Jawad was arrested on January 1 as Zionist troops stormed his home in

Deir Ballut town, located 41 kilometers (25 miles) southwest of Nablus.

He is a member of the Hamas-affiliated Change and Reform parliamentary bloc, and has previously spent over 16 years in the regime’s prisons.

On January 22, Zionist troops detained a legislator linked to the Gaza-based Hamas resistance movement along with more than a dozen other Palestinians during separate raids across the occupied West Bank.

More than 7,000 Palestinians are reportedly held at the regime’s jails. Hundreds of the inmates have apparently been incarcerated under the practice of administrative detention, a policy under which Palestinian inmates are kept in the Zionist regime’s detention facilities without trial or charge.

Some Palestinian prisoners have been held in administrative detention for up to 11 years.

‘Zionist PM Aide to Testify Against Him in Graft Probe’

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – A longtime confidante of Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has reportedly reached a deal with police to incriminate his boss during a probe into one of the four corruption cases involving the premier in return for a lighter prison sentence.

Under “Case 4000,” Netanyahu stands accused of favoring the Israeli telephone communications giant Bezeq in exchange for positive coverage on its Walla! portal, one of the most popular among Israelis.

Now, Netanyahu’s handpicked director of the former Zionist Communications Ministry, Shlomo

Filber, who was arrested this week as a suspect in the case, has agreed to testify how Netanyahu ordered him to provide Bezeq with regulatory benefits, Israeli media reported Wednesday.

In exchange for his testimony, Filber has demanded not to receive an active prison sentence, the reports said.

Last week, police recommended that the prime minister be indicted for fraud, breach of trust, and bribery in two of the cases.

In Case 1000, he is suspected of having received gifts from businessmen overseas. In Case

2000, Netanyahu is accused of helping Yediot Aharonot newspaper against its competitor Yisrael Hayom, likewise in return for favorable coverage for the prime minister.

The indictment recommendation prompted calls among the regime’s opposition leaders for Netanyahu to leave office, with the head of the Labor Party, Avi Gabbay and Yair Lapid, who chairs the opposition Yesh Atid party, urging the premier’s coalition partners to leave his ranks.

A Case 3000 is also looking into potential wrongdoing involving Netanyahu’s personal lawyer and German shipbuilder ThyssenKrupp’s

local representative. Its focus is an enormous deal for the purchase of naval vessels and submarines from the company.

Earlier in the month, Israeli lawmaker Aida Touma-Sliman said Netanyahu was seeking to instigate a regional war to deflect attention from the ongoing investigation into his suspected corrupt practices.

The right-wing premier has fallen out of favor with a good part of the Israelis due to the corruption cases.

Thousands of Israelis have been holding weekly protests, calling on the scandal-hit prime minister to step down.