

## 'Zionist Regime Seeking Direct Saudi Flights for Hajj'

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime's communications minister says Tel Aviv is seeking direct flights to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj pilgrimage as the two sides move closer to forge a model of relations. In an interview with Bloomberg earlier this week, Ayoub Kara expressed hope that Israeli Muslims would be able to fly directly from Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport to Saudi Arabia, instead of enduring the 1,000-mile bus route across the Jordan River and through the Saudi desert to reach the holy city of Mecca.

There are many educated people who have ruined their future on account of their ignorance of religion. Their knowledge did not prove of any avail to them.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

# Fresh U.S. Strikes Kill 10 Syrian Civilians

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – Nearly a dozen civilians have lost their lives when the U.S.-led coalition purportedly fighting the Daesh terrorist group carried out a string of aerial attacks in Syria's militant terrorist-held northern city of Raqqah.

Informed sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the airstrikes targeted al-Diriyah neighborhood of the city, located about 455 kilometers (283 miles) northeast of the capital Damascus, early on Thursday, Arabic-language Baladi news network reported.

The sources added that seven of the victims were members of one family.

At least nine civilians were killed on July 4, when U.S.-led fighter jets carried out airstrikes on Syria's northeastern province of Hasakah.

Lebanon's al-Ahed news website reported that the U.S.-led airstrikes hit Kashkash Zayanat village, near the Shaddadah town in the south-



A burning car is seen after a car bomb attack in Syria's northwestern town of A'zaz on July 14, 2017.

ern countryside of Hasakah city.

In another development on Syria, the United Nations special envoy for Syria has raised the possibility of direct talks between Damascus and opposition negotiators before the next round of peace talks in the Swiss city of Geneva.

Staffan de Mistura made the prediction during the seventh round of the Geneva talks. He ruled out

the probability of the Saudi-backed Syria opposition bloc, High Negotiations Committee (HNC), uniting with the Moscow- and Cairo-based opposition groups for direct talks with the Syrian government during the ongoing round of the Geneva talks.

Asked whether such a meeting could take place before the 8th round of the Geneva discussions

scheduled for late August, de Mistura replied, "Perhaps even earlier."

"I'm not pushing for it. Because I want, when it happens, that there should not be a row but should be real talks. We are actually pushing for areas where they do have common points," he added.

Meanwhile, U.S. President Donald Trump says a recent Syria ceasefire deal brokered by the U.S. and Russia shows his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin was a success.

"By having dialogue we were able to have a ceasefire. It's going to go on for a while and frankly we're working on a second ceasefire in a very rough part of Syria," Trump said at a joint press conference with his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron at the Elysee Palace in Paris on Wednesday.

"And if we get that and a few more, all of a sudden you're going to have no bullets being fired in Syria. And that would be a wonderful thing," he added.

## '150 Saudi Intelligence Officers Joined Daesh in Mosul Battle'



Iraqi troops arrest a suspected Daesh terrorist in western Mosul, Iraq, February 26, 2017.

RIYADH (Dispatches) – Saudi intelligence officers to Mosul to join the Daesh terrorists and direct them in

battles against Iraqi government forces and allied fighters from Popular Mobilization Units, a recent report has revealed.

Lebanon-based Arabic-language al-Manar television network, citing a report published by Qatari al-Sharq newspaper, revealed that 150 Saudi intelligence agents were fighting alongside Daesh members in Mosul, and working hard to extend the battle.

The paper added that Iraqi government forces confiscated important documents certifying Saudi intelligence officers' assistance to Daesh terrorists once they liberated Mosul from the clutches of the terrorists.

On Monday, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi formally declared

victory over Daesh extremists in Mosul, which served as the extremists' main urban stronghold in the conflict-ridden Arab country.

In the run-up to Mosul's liberation, Iraqi army soldiers and volunteer fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units had made sweeping gains against Daesh since launching the operation on October 17, 2016.

The Iraqi forces took control of eastern Mosul in January after 100 days of fighting, and launched the battle in the west on February 19.

An estimated 862,000 people have been displaced from Mosul ever since the battle to retake the city began eight months ago. A total of 195,000 civilians have also returned, mainly to the liberated areas of eastern Mosul.

## Iraq Popular Forces Set to Liberate More Daesh-Held Areas

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – The spokesman for pro-government Popular Mobilization Units, commonly by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, says the volunteer fighters will join army soldiers in counter-terrorism operations to liberate the last remaining areas in Iraq still controlled by the Takfiri Daesh terrorists.

Ahmed al-Assadi stated that his fellow fighters "will be a main partner in liberating Hawijah and all other militant-controlled regions."

The town of Hawijah, located 45 kilometers west of the oil-rich northern city of Kirkuk, has been under the control of Daesh terrorists since June 2014, when the extremists' leader Ibrahim al-Samarrai aka Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared his self-styled "caliphate."

Assadi's remarks came only three days after

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi formally declared victory over Daesh extremists in Mosul, which served as the terrorists' main urban stronghold in the conflict-ridden Arab country.

In the run-up to Mosul liberation, Iraqi army soldiers and volunteer fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units had made sweeping gains against Daesh since launching the Mosul operation on October 17, 2016.

### Over Dozen Dead in Anbar Blast

In another development, more than a dozen people have lost their lives and several others sustained injuries when members of the Daesh terrorist group carried out a bomb attack in Iraq's troubled western province of Anbar.

A provincial security source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said two Daesh terrorists, wearing explosive belts, attacked a joint military camp of pro-government Popular Mobilization Units, and army soldiers in the city of al-Karmah, located 16 kilometers northeast of Fallujah, on Thursday afternoon, Arabic-language Shafaaq news agency reported.

The explosions killed two army soldiers and wounded two others. Fifteen Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters also lost their lives and seven others suffered injuries in the act of terror.

The development came only three days after Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi formally declared victory over Daesh extremists in Mosul, which served as the terrorists' main urban stronghold in the conflict-ridden Arab country.

## 'Turkey to Pay \$2.5bn for Russian S-400 Missiles'

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkey has agreed to pay \$2.5 billion in order to purchase Russia's most advanced missile defense system S-400, provided that Moscow agrees to transfer the technology as well, an official says.

"For Turkey, the key aspect of any deal is transfer of technology or know-how. The Russian agreement to allow two of the S-400 batteries to be produced in Turkey will serve that aim," the unnamed official told Bloomberg.

Under the deal, Russia would send two S-400 systems to Turkey within the next year and then help the country to domestically produce two more batteries.

If true, the deal would be a slap in the face for NATO. The U.S.-led military alliance has tried to prevent Turkey—as a strategic member—from forging close ties with Russia.

However, Turkey's drift towards Russia seems to be a direct result of Turkish President Recep Tayyip

Erdogan's growing frustration with the West and in particular with America.

Ankara has been upset with Washington's lack of respect for its demands on extraditing key opposition figure Fethullah Gulen, whom Turkey accuses of staging last year's botched coup in the country.

The Turkish government says it has "85 boxes of concrete evidence" that prove Gulen was behind the coup attempt on July 15 last year,

which killed some 250 people and injured over 2,100.

Erdogan has also been disappointed with the U.S.' support for some Kurdish groups in Iraq and Syria, which he deems a threat for his country's national security.

The move has also been described by experts as Turkey's response to Washington's decision in 2015 to withdraw its Patriot surface-to-air missile system from Turkey's border with Syria.

## Amnesty: Saudi Arabia Stifles Shia Dissent With Execution



Pakistani Shia Muslims march during a protest in Quetta on January 3, 2016, against the execution of prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr by Saudi Arabia.

RIYADH (Dispatches) – Saudi Arabia is using the death penalty as a means to silence Shia dissent, says Amnesty International.

"These brutal executions are the latest act in the Saudi Arabian authorities' ongoing persecution of the Shia minority. The death penalty is being deployed as a political weapon to punish them for daring to protest against their treatment and to cow others into silence," said the group's director for research Lynn Maalouf.

Maalouf made the remarks after Saudi Arabia executed four Shias in the kingdom's oil-rich Eastern Province over allegations of conducting terrorist activities.

"The international community must come down hard on Saudi Arabia to ensure that others currently facing execution after deeply flawed legal proceedings do not meet the same fate. Saudi Arabia should quash their death sentences and establish an official moratorium on execu-

tions," she added.

Amnesty has documented a further 34 other cases of Shia men currently sentenced to death mostly following unfair trials based largely on confessions obtained by torture.

The Shia-dominated Eastern Province, particularly the Qatif region, has been the scene of peaceful demonstrations since February 2011.

In another development, a court in Saudi Arabia has postponed until next month the trial of distinguished Shia cleric Ayatollah al-Sheikh Hussein al-Radhi over his anti-regime comments as Riyadh presses ahead with its heavy-handed crackdown on members of the religious community.

His lawyer and human rights advocate, Taha al-Hajji, said on Thursday that the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh had adjourned the trial of the 66-year-old clergyman until August, without specifying an exact date.

## Fire Causes Blasts at Turkey Military Zone

ANKARA (Dispatches) – A large fire has erupted at a military zone in Turkey's southern province of Kilis, near the Syrian border, triggering small blasts as it spread to a nearby ammunition depot, media report.

According to a statement by the provincial governor's office, the blaze broke out in a temporary military base on the outskirts of the south-central province due to a yet unknown cause.

The fire sent black plumes of smoke above the site, which is located some two kilometers from an organized industrial zone near the provincial capital, Kilis.

According to the state-run Anadolu News Agency, the statement added that the blaze also triggered small explosions as it reached a nearby ammunition depot, making 10 soldiers suffer mild smoke inhalation.

The incident halted traffic on a

highway in the area as firefighters worked to contain the raging flames despite blasts.

The military quarters where the blaze erupted are on the highway connecting Kilis and the region's largest city, Gaziantep.

Back in July 24 last year, a massive fire broke out in the vicinity of a NATO military base in an area straddling the Sahintepe and Mevkiinde districts in Turkey's western city of Izmir. Some news outlets at the time speculated that the fire might have been an act of "sabotage."

The speculation was particularly strengthened amid a Turkish crackdown on people deemed involved in a botched coup, which had been carried out nine days earlier.

The Thursday blaze also occurred some two days prior to the first anniversary of the failed coup.