

BRASILIA (Dispatches) – Brazilian Agriculture Minister Tereza Cristina Dias said on Friday the farm sector is worried that President Jair Bolsonaro's plan to move Brazil's embassy in the Israeli-occupied territories to al-Quds could hurt halal meat exports to Muslim countries. "Of course the agricultural sector that I represent is worried," Dias told Reuters, when asked about possible repercussions for trade with Arab countries if the embassy were to be moved. "Brazil cannot lose markets, we need to open new markets," she said.

## 'Zionist Regime Behind Crises in Middle East'

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – A high-ranking member of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement has accused the Zionist regime of Israel of being behind most crises in the Middle East region.

"The Israeli occupation [regime] is the biggest problem in our region. It intervenes in world's issues... [while] the United States and Europe help it to normalize relations with some Arab countries, so that the regime is accepted internationally and regionally in particular," Hezbollah Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Naim Qassem said in an interview with Arabic-language al-Manar television network.

He added, "Israel is the main problem in the region as it is behind many existing crises. This region will continue to suffer from successive and cumulative crises as long as the Israeli occupation [regime] exists and acts in such an aggressive manner under American super-



Hezbollah Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Naim Qassem

vision."

"We must always bear in mind that Israel is a great danger; and that Arab and Muslim countries should reach an understanding with each other and work out appropriate means of cooperation. I am warning those countries seeking

normalization of ties with the Israeli enemy that your bids will destroy your nations. Protect the independence of your countries against Israel rather than facilitating such a scheme!" Qassem pointed out.

The senior Hezbollah official then noted that the U.S. has failed miser-

ably in Syria, describing Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's tour of the Middle East as an attempt by the White House to raise the morale of its frustrated regional allies.

He then scoffed at the recent visit by U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale to Beirut, stating that the solution to Lebanon's government formation deadlock is "domestic."

"Hale knows very well that he is not in a position to dictate things on Lebanon and its officials. He who does not see daily Israeli violations against Lebanon as an aggression is not eligible to give advice about citizenship and Lebanon's future," Qassem underlined.

"Hence, he is advised to know that the future of Lebanon is in the hands of its nation, and Lebanon's interests are not expected to be in line with the failed U.S.-Israeli plan, which has ruined the region," he said.

## 'At Least 20 Civilians Killed by U.S. Strike in Dayr al-Zawr'



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DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – Syrian state television reported the death of 20 civilians in Dayr al-Zawr Province as a result of an airstrike by the U.S.-led coalition.

"About 20 civilians were killed, several more were injured, including women and children, as a result of an airstrike by the international coalition on the village of Baghuz Tahtani in the east of Dayr al-Zawr province," state-run Ikhbariya television reported, citing local sources.

The coalition regularly carries out airstrikes in the province of Dayr al-Zawr under the pretext of helping so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) forces in the fight against the Daesh terrorist group.

Earlier, Syrian authorities called on the UN to take action to stop the illegal presence of the U.S.-led coalition in Syria.

According to the Syrian Arab News Agency, in November 2018, the coalition used dropped prohibited cluster bombs on targets in the Arab Republic. However, U.S. authorities insisted that their airstrikes in Syria comply with the laws of armed conflict.

In another development, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says he believes the recent deadly bomb attack in Syria's flashpoint northern city of Manbij, which killed several American soldiers, would not impact US President

Donald Trump's decision to withdraw troops from war-torn Syria.

Speaking at a joint press conference with his Croatian counterpart, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, in Ankara, Erdogan said Wednesday's bomb attack in Kurdish-controlled Manbij "might have been meant to affect Trump's decision to pull out from Syria."

"But as I saw Mr. Trump's decisiveness, I don't think a backward step would follow such a terror attack," he said.

Erdogan said that at least 20 people, including five US troops, were killed in the bomb explosion that struck near a patrol of the US-led coalition purportedly fighting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in Manbij.

A US official had earlier told Reuters that four American troops had been killed and three wounded in the blast claimed by Daesh terrorist group. Others said only two had been killed.

"The information I have is news pointing toward that there are five US soldiers and 20 died in total," the Turkish leader said.

Following Manbij's bomb attack, US Vice President Mike Pence said that the withdrawal of American troops from Syria would go ahead as planned, but US forces would remain in the region to ensure that "ISIS (Daesh) does not rear its ugly head again."

## UN Yemen Monitors Slammed for Bias for Saudi Arabia

SANAA (Dispatches) – Yemeni officials have voiced concern over a UN mission's bias in favor of the Saudi regime against Houthi Ansarullah fighters in the Hudaydah truce deal.

Yemen's Supreme Revolutionary Committee head Mohammed Ali al-Houthi highlighted the failure of the UN mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) to hold the Saudis accountable after one of its own vehicles was targeted in the port city of Hudaydah.

The attack caused no casualties. The UN declined to identify the party behind the shooting.

Al-Houthi believes Saudi-led forces were responsible for the attack and the UN's silence may

indicate the monitoring mission is not prepared to carry out its duties correctly.

Al-Houthi suggested that the silence was more probably a case of the UN's intentional bias in favor of the Saudi-led forces.

Supreme Political Council member Mohammed al-Bukhaiti also echoed al-Houthi's comments, adding that the UNMHA chief monitor Patrick Cammaert has "sought to see the Stockholm agreement fail" ever since he was appointed to the mission.

"We will not accept dialogue around increasing the number of international monitors until the problem of Patrick Cammaert is resolved," said al-Bukhaiti.

Also on Thursday, seven Yemeni army personnel were killed following two Saudi airstrikes north of Hudaydah, according to Yemen's Armed Forces spokesman Brigadier General Yahya Saree.

The comments came after representatives of Yemeni warring parties, the Houthi Ansarullah movement and the country's former Saudi-backed government, have held their second session of talks in Jordan in an attempt to thrash out the details of a major prisoner swap, a UN source says.

Last Month, the two sides signed an agreement for a partial ceasefire at the end of UN-brokered peace negotiations,

mediated by Martin Griffiths, the UN special envoy for Yemen, in Rimbo, north of the Swedish capital Stockholm.

According to the agreement, the Houthi fighters, who are in control of the port city of Hudaydah, and former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi's allied militia together with Saudi-led forces — who have placed the city under a tight siege since June — must withdraw from the port and hand it over to UN observers.

The two sides further agreed to exchange prisoners of war and issued a statement of understanding on the southwestern city of Ta'izz, another flashpoint area in the war-ravaged country.

## Afghans March to Call for of U.S. Troops Pullout

KABUL (Dispatches) – Several hundred protesters have marched in three cities in southern and eastern Afghanistan to call for a ceasefire and an end to the US-led war in the country.

The Thursday marches took place in Kandahar, the southern cradle of the Taliban, and in the eastern cities of Khost and Jalalabad.

The participants held placards and chanted slogans such as "No War", "We want ceasefire" and "We want Peace."

Bismillah Watandost, a member of the People for Peace Movement, urged the Taliban to respond to a truce offer proposed by the Afghan government last year.

"Afghans want an absolute ceasefire as soon as possible. The government had agreed a one-year ceasefire and the Taliban must accept their demand."

Haji Farhad, a protester in Jalalabad, said that people of Afghanistan had been fed up with the ongoing war and violence.

"We call on the Taliban to come to the peace talks with the Afghan government and have mercy on the Afghan people. Our men, women, children and widows want peace. We are tired of war."

### Trump Vows to Stick to Afghanistan Policy

The march comes as U.S. President Donald Trump has reassured the GOP that he would stick

to his plans for troop pullout from Syria and Afghanistan.

Trump made the comment among a group of Republican senators at the White House Wednesday evening.

Trump's decision to pull out of Syria and reduce forces in Afghanistan has been met with some opposition.

Kentucky Republican Senator Rand Paul, a libertarian conservative, is among those supporting the president.

In regard to Afghanistan Paul asserted that, "We're not going to stay forever. The Afghans will need to step up. The Afghans will need to begin fighting their own wars and taking care of their country... It's not that we'll do nothing. I think the president still will help them. I think we'll still actually probably be there longer than I would like to be."

In recent months, the war-weary grassroots peace movement in Afghanistan has organized a series of sit-ins and a hunger strike demanding that both the government and the Taliban implement a ceasefire.

In May 2018, the peace marches began when a handful of civilians traveled 700 kilometers from Lashkar Gah in the southern province of Helmand to end their journey in the capital Kabul.

Since then, many others have been organized, including a wheelchair peace march by amputees between the western city of Herat and Kabul.

The developments come as the Kabul government has stepped up efforts to convince the Taliban to end more than 17 years of militancy amid Washington's failures on the battleground.

The US, too, has been holding talks with the Taliban. The U.S. State Department's special envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, has said that he had held "productive" meetings in Abu Dhabi with Afghan and international partners "to promote intra-Afghan dialogue towards ending the conflict."

Khalilzad said the Taliban seek an agreement on the withdrawal of foreign forces, while the US wants assurances from the militant group that its forces would not be attacked.

Khalilzad is currently in Pakistan on the last leg of his regional tour aimed at finding a negotiated end to Washington's longest military engagement.

Khalilzad said in the Afghan capital Wednesday that he hoped for fresh talks with the Taliban "very soon" after meetings with them in late 2018 in Doha and Abu Dhabi.

The talks are the latest in a flurry of diplomatic efforts aimed at putting an end to the war in Afghanistan, which began with the U.S.-led invasion in 2001.

U.S. President Donald Trump has ordered the start of withdrawing some 7,000 troops from Afghanistan, about half of the total number of American boots on the ground in the war-torn country.

## Lebanon's FM Calls for Syria's Return to Arab League

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon's Caretaker Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil called on Friday for reinstating Syria into the Arab League.

"Syria should return to us... Syria should be in our embrace instead of throwing it into the embrace of terrorism," he told Arab foreign and economy ministers at a summit that Beirut is hosting.

On the summit of the League on Friday, addressing the issue of the absence of a delegation from Syria in Beirut, Bassil said it will create vacuum at the forum.

"[The absence of] Syria will leave the largest vacuum at this conference," Bassil said, speaking in front of the Arab League foreign ministers.

The summit is expected to open in the Lebanese capital on Saturday and last through Sunday. Meanwhile, the Syrian ambassador in Lebanon said that Syria, whose membership in the Arab

League was suspended back in 2011, did receive an invitation to attend the economic forum but declined it. The Arab League, however, refuted the statement, insisting that Damascus had not been invited to attend the event.

Syria's membership of the Arab League was suspended following the beginning of the foreign-backed war in the country. Syria, which is one of the founding states of the Arab League, condemned the decision, considering the move illegal. Since then, Damascus has not been participating in the work of the organization.

The armed conflict also prompted dozens of countries, including some of the league members, to close their embassies in Damascus. However, last December, the United Arab Emirates, one of the league members, became the first Persian Gulf country to reopen its embassy in the Syrian capital.