

BAGHDAD (Al Jazeera) – An Iraqi court has ordered the arrest of four people accused of setting fire to a storage site housing ballot boxes from a May parliamentary election, state media said. Three of the suspects are policemen and the fourth is an employee of the Independent High Elections Commission, state television said. The storage site holding half of Baghdad’s ballot boxes went up in flames on Sunday in what Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi denounced as a “plot to harm the nation and its democracy”. Last week, parliament passed a law for a recount of 11 million votes, following allegations of fraud during the May 12 elections.

Those are the fortunate people who adopt piety as the principle of their lives and are fully attentive to their welfare for the Hereafter. They accept bare earth as the most comfortable bed and water as the most pleasant drink.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Saudi-Led Coalition Gears Up for Battle in Key Yemeni Port City

ADEN (Dispatches) – A Saudi-led coalition geared up on Tuesday for an assault on Yemen’s main port, preparing to launch by far the biggest battle of a three-year-old war between an alliance of Arab states and the Houthi movement that controls Yemen’s capital.

The United Arab Emirates, one of the main members of the Western-backed alliance, has set the deadline for the Houthi fighters to withdraw from the port of Hudaydah under UN-led negotiations or face an assault.

It would be the first time since they joined the war on behalf of Yemen’s exiled government that the foreign armies have attempted to capture the city.

Hudaydah, Yemen’s biggest port and the only port controlled by the Houthis, serves as the lifeline for the majority of Yemen’s population, which lives in Houthi-ruled territory.

The United States is standing idly by in the face of an imminent military offensive by its ally on the Yemeni port city, which the UN and aid groups have warned could lead to a humanitarian catastrophe there.

In the past few days, forces loyal to Yemen’s ex-president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, backed by a Saudi-led coalition, have closed in on Hudaydah, reportedly seizing a number of nearby areas. The UAE,



A Yemeni soldier, loyal to ex-president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, fires a machine gun near the city of Hajjah, Hudaydah Province, June 7, 2018.

which is a party to the Saudi-led coalition, is playing a key role in the offensive.

The United Nations said it was engaged in “intense” shuttle diplomacy between the Houthis and coalition leaders Saudi Arabia and the UAE to avert the attack.

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) says it has “temporarily frozen” its humanitarian activities in northwestern Yemen after an airstrike carried out by warplanes of a Saudi-led military coalition hit a cholera treatment center run by the international medical charity.

“This morning’s attack on an MSF cholera treatment center by the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition shows complete disrespect for

medical facilities and patients,” said Joao Martins, MSF’s head of mission in Yemen, in a statement.

His comments came hours after Saudi-led fighter jets struck a newly-built clinic of MSF in the Abs district in the northwestern province of Hajjah. Martins said that the center had been empty at the time of the airstrike, hence, left no casualties.

He added that the facility’s roof clearly identified it as a medical center and that its coordinates had been previously given to the so-called Saudi-led coalition.

“MSF has temporarily frozen its activities in Abs until the safety of its staff and patients is guaranteed,” Martins further said.

Since July 2015, the international charity group has been supporting the Abs hospital, which according to the MSF, is just one kilometer away from the cholera treatment center targeted on Monday.

Saudi Arabia and its allies launched the war on Yemen in March 2015 to install a former regime that had been loyal to Riyadh.

The Yemeni Ministry of Human Rights announced in a statement on March 25 that the Saudi-led war had left 600,000 civilians dead and injured until then.

The war and an accompanying blockade have caused famine across Yemen. The United Nations says a record 22.2 million people are in need of food aid, including 8.4 million threatened by severe hunger.

The Saudi aggression has also taken a heavy toll on the country’s facilities and infrastructure, destroying many hospitals, schools, and factories.

Since 2016, the impoverished nation has also been grappling with a deadly cholera outbreak, which has already killed thousands of people.

Several Western countries, the US and the UK in particular, are accused of being complicit in the aggression as they supply the Riyadh regime with advanced weapons and military equipment as well as logistical and intelligence assistance.

Taliban Kill Afghan Officials as Gov’t Ceasefire Kicks In



Afghan security personnel keep watch at the site of an attack by Taliban militants on a government compound in the Khwaja Omari district in the southeastern province of Ghazni, April 12, 2018.

KABUL (Dispatches) – Taliban militants killed a district governor in northern Afghanistan and kept up the pressure to seize control over some parts of Faryab province, ignoring the temporary ceasefire announced by the government that came into effect on Tuesday.

Last week Afghan President Ashraf Ghani had announced for the first time an unconditional ceasefire with the Taliban, coinciding with the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. In response, the Afghan Taliban announced a surprise three-day ceasefire over the Muslim Eid holiday in the middle of June.

The government’s eight-day ceasefire started on Tuesday and the Taliban’s three-day ceasefire will start on Friday.

The Taliban have not stopped their attacks. Insurgents killed Abdurrahman Panah, the district governor of Kohistanat district in Faryab province.

At least eight Afghan security officials have been killed in the ongoing clashes, two officials said.

Javed Bedar, spokesman for Faryab province confirmed the death of a district governor and that the district center had fallen to Taliban.

“We know that the ceasefire has been announced but we have the right to defend ourselves,” said Bedar, adding that they were seeking immediate reinforcements.

In Ghazni, a southern province, insurgents placed a Humvee vehicle car

bomb near the house of a district governor on Tuesday.

Mohammad Arif Noori, spokesman for the provincial governor in Ghazni, said the Taliban militants hit the first checkpoint of a district governor house’s compound that left five Afghan security forces dead and 26 others injured, including the district governor.

Fighting was also underway in Sar-e-Pul, a northern province where the insurgents had captured two checkpoints.

In another development, the Taliban denounced “American occupying forces” for attacking their Voice of Shariah Radio station in the central province of Ghazni, but the United States denied the charge and said Afghan air force planes had targeted a broadcasting tower.

The “Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate” will “not show restraint regarding such evil enemy actions any more”, the Taliban said of Sunday’s attack which they said involved five U.S. aircraft.

“The claimants of democracy and freedom of speech exposed their true nature and showed that they have absolutely no respect for the views, voice and media of their opposition,” the Taliban, who have hit media targets themselves in the past, said in a statement.

“They only use the slogans of ‘freedom of speech’ to force their own views, culture and colonial agendas on foreign nations.”

Turkish Military Destroys 12 Targets in Iraq

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) – The Turkish military destroyed 12 targets in northern Iraq belonging to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in overnight air strikes, it said on Tuesday, as the army steps up operations against militant targets in the Qandil region.

The targets, in northern Iraq’s Qandil, Hakurk and Avasin-Basyan regions, included shelters and ammunition depots, it said. Turkey’s army has recently ramped up strikes against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in northern Iraq, which has bases in the Qandil mountains.

The army also said that 34 militants had been “neutralized” in operations in northern Iraq between June 1 and June 8. The military uses the term “neutralized” to refer to operations in which opposition forces have been killed, wounded or captured.

President Tayyip Erdogan, who faces presidential elections on June 24, on Monday said Turkey would drain the “terror swamp” in Qandil. The PKK, which has waged a

three-decade insurgency in Turkey’s largely Kurdish southeast, is considered a terrorist organization by the United States, Europe and Turkey.

Turkey has conducted frequent airstrikes against PKK targets in northern Iraq. It previously carried out cross-border operations in the region in the 1990s and 2000s. A shaky ceasefire between Ankara and the PKK that had stood since 2013 was declared null and void by the militants in 2015 in the wake of a large-scale Turkish campaign against the group.

The Turkish government has been opening military fronts against Kurdish groups in Syria as well. Earlier this year, it launched the ongoing Olive Branch offensive against the purported positions of the US-backed People’s Protection Units (YPG) Kurdish militia in Syria’s western enclave of Afrin.

Ankara considers the YPG a terror group and the Syrian branch of the PKK. The Turkish operation has been launched without permission from the Syrian government.

Russia Defense Ministry: U.S. Aiding False Flag Chemical Attacks in Syria

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – U.S. Special Forces are aiding terrorists in Syria to engage in “chemical attack provocation” via chlorine gas to provoke Western airstrikes on Syrian forces, says the Russian Defense Ministry.

“Our intelligence confirmed by three independent Syrian sources says that commanders of the so-called ‘Free Syrian Army’, backed by the American Special Forces operators, are preparing a serious provocation involving chemical warfare agents in Dayr al-Zawr province,” said a statement released by the ministry.

It added that the FSA militants would probably use chlorine to

launch a chemical attack.

“To imitate yet another ‘chemical attack by the regime against peaceful civilians’, the rebels brought canisters filled with chlorine,” it added.

It noted that reports of such a move would be distributed in Western media and used as a pretext for further coalition airstrikes against Syrian forces.

In Mar, a high-ranking Russian military commander has warned that the United States is training foreign-sponsored terrorists in the hope that they would launch false flag chemical attacks in southern Syria to provide a pretext for Washington to carry out airstrikes

on Syrian government troops and infrastructure.

“We have reliable information at our disposal that U.S. instructors have trained a number of militant groups in the vicinity of the town of At-Tanf to stage provocations involving chemical warfare agents in southern Syria,” Russian General Staff spokesman General Sergey Rudskoy said at a news briefing in Moscow.

In another development, following days of intense fighting, Syrian government forces have thwarted an attempt by Daesh remnants to seize a strategic town near the Iraqi border, clearing all its neighborhoods of terrorists.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said that Syrian troops and their allied forces had fully secured Bukamal, which lies on the Euphrates River in the eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr after days of violent clashes with the terrorists.

Syrian “forces and their allies regained control of the whole town of al-Bukamal after expelling Daesh from its northern and northwestern parts,” said the head of the UK-based observatory, Rami Abdel-Rahman.

The terrorists had on Friday sent bombers into several neighborhoods of Bukamal to pave the way for their advance on the city.

called the move as a “highly regrettable” event.

The Turkish government denounced Austria’s decision to close mosques and expel imams as “a reflection of the Islamophobic, racist and discriminatory wave in this country.”

Austria, however, is shutting down the mosques based on a 2015 tough “law on Islam” that among other things bans foreign funding of religious groups.

In a previous job as minister in charge of integration, Kurz oversaw the passing of the law.

The right-wing coalition government of Austria has been accused of fanning anti-Islamic sentiments in the European state. Austria is home to around 600,000 Muslims most of whom are Turkish or have families of Turkish origin.

The Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz also said the government was shutting down a Turkish nationalist mosque in the capital Vienna and dissolving a group called the Arab Religious Community that runs six other mosques.

Kurz, who became chancellor in December in a coalition with the anti-migration Freedom Party, said the decision was made after an investigation into images of children, who were playing dead and reenacting the World War I battle of Gallipoli in Turkish-backed mosques.

He was referring to images, which emerged in April, showing children waving Turkish flags and then playing dead.

The Turkish-Islamic Cultural Associations (ATIB) organization denounced the photos at the time. It

Turkey Slams Austria’s Anti-Muslim Decision

ANKARA (Press TV) – Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim has slammed Austria’s decision to shut down several mosques and deport dozens of foreign-funded imams as a threat against interfaith dialogue and called for revision of the decision.

Yildirim made the remarks at a Tuesday press conference, saying it is a “great mistake and greatly unfortunate” that Vienna made the decision shortly before taking over the presidency of the EU.

A spokesman for the Austrian government has declined to comment.

Last week, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz announced plans to order the closure of seven mosques and the expulsion of up to 60 imams, including 40 members of the Union of Turkish-Islamic Cultural Associations in Europe (ATIB).