

ANKARA (Anadolu) – Prime Minister Binali Yildirim has hinted that Alevi houses of worship would be granted legal status in Turkey. “We have decided to take the status of Alevi house of worship and Irfan [culture] centers out from discussion,” Yildirim said in his address to Alevi opinion leaders in Istanbul. Alevi have been for long urging Turkish governments to grant official status to their houses of worship. The exact size of the Alevi population in Turkey is not known, but they constitute the second-largest religious community in the country after Sunni Muslims. Yildirim also said Turkey should confront its history as he recalled the 1938 massacre in eastern Tunceli province, which was then called Dersim.

We, Ahlul Bayt (chosen descendants of the Holy Prophet), hold such central and balancing position in religion that those who are deficient in understanding and acting upon its principles, will have to come to us for reformation, and those who are overdoing it have got to learn moderation from us.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

## Saudi-Led Coalition Conducts Airstrikes on Yemen's Hudaydah

ADEN (Dispatches) – A Saudi-led coalition conducted airstrikes on Yemen's Hudaydah airport on Sunday to support forces trying to seize control from Houthi fighters, Saudi and Houthi-run media reported.

Warplanes carried out five strikes on the port city of Hudaydah, a lifeline to millions of Yemenis, according to SABA, the official Houthi news agency. Saudi-owned broadcaster Al Arabiya also reported strikes on the airport.

Ground troops, including United Arab Emirates, Sudanese and Yemenis from various factions, surrounded the main airport compound on Saturday, said a source in the coalition-allied Yemeni military.

“We have lived in a state of terror for three days because we are in a neighborhood close to the airport,” said resident Khaled Ateeq, 38.

In other reports, Yemen's Houthi fighters dismissed reports that Saudi-led forces have seized the airport in the port city of Hudaydah, saying the aggressors are on the retreat on all front lines.

Militants and foreign mercenaries armed by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are attempt-



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ing to capture the well-defended city and push the Houthis out of their sole Red Sea port in the biggest battle of the war.

“A battle of attrition awaits the Saudi alliance which it cannot withstand. The Saudi coalition will not win the battle in Hudaydah,” Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam told Lebanon-based al-Mayadeen TV.

Mohammed al-Sharif, deputy head of Yemen's civil aviation, said images circulated online about the

airport had been taken in October 2016.

A fence shown as proof of the airport's capture is actually situated near the al-Durayhimi district, on a piece of land belonging to a Yemeni lawmaker, the official Saba news agency quoted him as saying.

Ahmed Taresh, the head of Hudaydah airport, also denied news of the airport's capture, but said that it has been completely destroyed in airstrikes conducted by the Saudi-led coalition.

Abdulsalam warned that the Saudi-UAE offensive against the port city would undermine chances for a peaceful settlement of the Yemen crisis.

The rebuttals came after the media office of the Saudi-backed Yemeni forces loyal to ex-president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi said on Twitter that they had “freed Hudaydah international airport from the grip of” the Houthis.

Reports on Sunday said Saudi-backed forces had been surrounded in the al-Durayhimi Bayt al-Faqih district and at least 40 Saudi mercenaries killed by Yemeni sniper fire over the past two days.

Al-Mayadeen, meanwhile, cited informed sources as saying that the invading forces had retreated from all fronts in Hudaydah's west.

A Yemeni military source said clashes had left 50 Saudi-backed forces dead and destroyed 13 of their armored vehicles in southern Hudaydah.

Yemeni forces have also managed to confiscate a French or American ship off Hudaydah's coast, president of the Houthi Revolutionary Committee Mohammed Ali al-Houthi tweeted.

## 3 Shia Bahraini Clerics Sentenced to Death



Bahrainis protest against a ruling by Bahrain's military court sentencing Shia protesters to death.

MANAMA (Dispatches) – Bahraini regime officials have handed down death sentences to three Shia clergymen and condemned eight others to life imprisonment as the ruling Al Khalifah regime continues with its repressive measures and heavy-handed crackdown on members of the religious community.

Bahrain's dissolved main opposition group, al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, announced in a statement that Shia religious figures are being systematically subjected to arbitrary arrests, torture, trials, revocation of citizenship as well as forced deportation.

The statement added that al-Wefaq has recorded more than 347 cases of arrests, summons and various security prosecutions of Shia clerics in Bahrain.

It added that Bahraini security authorities have summoned more than 156 Shia clergymen over their speeches, ideological tendencies or political views. They have also arrested 99 religious scholars arbitrarily.

Al-Wefaq further noted that pointed out that “harsh and unfair verdicts” have targeted more than 50 clerics, ranging from hefty fines and abolition nationality to life imprisonment and death penalty.

The statement went on to say that three Shia scholars have been sentenced to death, eight to life imprisonment and a number of others been stripped of their citizenship. Among those whose nationality has been revoked are prominent Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Ahmed Qassim and Sheikh Hussein Najati.

They are demanding that the Al Khalifah dynasty relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established.

Manama has gone to great lengths to clamp down on any sign of dissent. On March 14, 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were deployed to assist Bahrain in its crackdown.

Meanwhile, imprisoned prominent Bahraini activist Hajer Mansoor Hassan has been finally taken to hospital after being denied medical treatment for three months.

Bahraini activists, requesting anonymity, said doctors ordered prison authorities to allow the 49-year-old pro-democracy campaigner to receive the necessary physical therapy during her checkup earlier this week, Arabic-language Lualua television network reported.

Hassan reportedly suffers from chronic back pain and needs to see a specialist regularly.

On March 23, she was hospitalized with hypoglycemia three days after beginning a hunger strike to protest the treatment of inmates at the notorious Isa Town Prison.

Hassan, who held her first hunger strike last October, and her 18-year-old son have been charged with planting a “fake bomb” in A'ali town south of Manama.

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the country in mid-February 2011.

They are demanding that the Al Khalifah dynasty relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established.

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## Turkish Fighter Jets Kill 35 Kurdish Militants in Northern Iraq

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkish military aircraft have “neutralized” nearly three dozen members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militant group when they carried out a string of airstrikes against terrorist hideouts in Iraq's northern semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

The Turkish General Staff, in a statement released on Sunday, announced that Turkish fighter jets bombarded Qandil region, neutralizing 35 Kurdish militants in the process.

The Turkish military generally uses the term “neutralize” to signify that the militants were killed, captured or surrendered.

President Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday Turkish warplanes have struck a meeting of the outlawed PKK in Iraq's Qandil mountains, adding that Ankara believed high-profile militants had been hit.

The Turkish military has ramped up air strikes in northern Iraq targeting PKK bases in Qandil, close to the Iraq-Iran border, where Ankara suspects high-ranking members of the militant group are located. The government has also said Turk-

ish troops have deployed roughly 30 km (nearly 20 miles) inside northern Iraq, not far from Qandil.

Speaking in an interview with Kanal 7 television, Erdogan said Turkish warplanes had struck a meeting point in the Qandil mountains where high-ranking members of the PKK were thought to be. The military would announce the outcome of the air strikes in the coming hours, he said.

“With the latest operations, we struck a very important meeting point of theirs. We haven't received the results yet, but it is certain that they have been hit,” Erdogan said.

Ankara has recently stepped up its warnings of a potential ground offensive in the Qandil mountains. Northern Iraq's Qandil mountains are situated close to the border between Iran and Iraq. Tehran holds significant influence over Iraq's central government in Baghdad.

Turkey has also been in talks with Iraq about the potential offensive but Erdogan said on Saturday that Ankara will wait to see a new government formed in Baghdad following May's election there before continuing talks.

### By Criminalizing Filming of Troops

## Zionist Regime Targets Human Rights Groups

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime moved on Sunday to snap the lens shut on rights groups that film its troops' interactions with Palestinians by introducing a bill that would make it a criminal offense.

Rights groups frequently film Zionist troops on duty in the occupied West Bank, documentation the organizations say is necessary to expose abuse by the military.

A video filmed by Israeli rights group B'Tselem in 2016 showing a Zionist trooper shoot dead an incapacitated Palestinian “assailant” drew international condemnation and led to the trooper's conviction for manslaughter in a highly divisive trial.

The proposed law, formulated by the extremist Yisrael Beitenu party in Zionist Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition, would make filming or publishing footage “with intent to harm the morale of Israel's soldiers or its inhabitants” punishable by up to five years in prison.

The term would be raised to 10 years if the intention was to damage “national security”.

A ministerial committee which oversees legislation voted to approve the bill on Sunday. It will now go to parliament for a vote that could take place this week and if ratified, will be scrutinized and amended before three more parliamentary votes needed for it to pass into law.

Yisrael Beitenu leader and war minister, Avigdor Lieberman, praised the committee and said: “Israeli soldiers are under constant attack by Israel haters and

supporters of terrorism who look constantly to degrade and sully them. We will put an end to this.”

A Palestinian official condemned the move.

“This decision aims to cover up crimes committed by Israeli soldiers against our people, and to free their hands to commit more crimes,” Deputy Palestinian Information Minister Fayez Abu Aitta told Reuters.

The phrasing of the bill stops short of a blanket ban, aiming instead at “anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian organizations” which spend “entire days near Israeli soldiers waiting breathlessly for actions that can be documented in a slanted and one-sided way so that soldiers can be smeared”.

Naming B'Tselem and several other rights groups, the bill says

many of them are supported by organizations and governments with “a clear anti-Israel agenda” and that the videos are used to harm the regime's security.

The ban would cover social networks as well as traditional media.

B'Tselem shrugged off the bill.

“If the occupation embarrasses the government, then the government should take action to end it. Documenting the reality of the occupation will continue regardless of such ridiculous legislation efforts,” the group's spokesman, Amit Gilutz, said.

B'Tselem's video of the shooting in the West Bank in 2016 led to Zionist trooper Elor Azaria being convicted of manslaughter. He was released in May after serving two-thirds of his 14-month term.

### Roaming Cities Amid Eid Euphoria

## Taliban Rule Out Ceasefire Extension

KABUL (Reuters) – Taliban militants headed into cities across Afghanistan on Sunday as they celebrated their Eid ceasefire with feasts and selfies, raising questions about what happens when the ceasefire ends at midnight.

President Ashraf Ghani said he would extend a government ceasefire and urged the Taliban to do the same, garnering praise at home and international backing, but critics said such overtures have allowed the Taliban to pour into cities unchecked and win the upper hand.

But the Taliban said there would be no extension, adding that their members were expected to leave government-controlled areas before sunset.

Ghani had committed “a grave mistake” by allowing Taliban militants to enter government-controlled areas, said Amarullah Saleh, a politi-

cian and former head of the National Directorate of Security.

“We don't have mechanisms in place to mitigate the breach of ceasefire by the Taliban,” Saleh told Reuters.

Members of parliament opposing Ghani's move said he had not consulted politicians and would be left with no recourse if the Taliban rejected his impromptu request.

A senior Western diplomat in Kabul said Ghani's decision was “a bold move” but questioned what happens if the Taliban do not extend their unprecedented halt in hostilities against government forces.

“The consequences could be disastrous,” he said.

An explosion in Jalalabad, outside the gover-

nor's office in Nangarhar province, killed at least 15 people on Sunday, an official said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility.

A car bomb killed 36 people at a gathering of Taliban and Afghan armed forces in the same province on Saturday. Islamic State, not covered by the government ceasefire, claimed responsibility.

Over the weekend, ecstatic men and children crowded around the soldiers and Taliban militants, some of whom had checked in their weapons at the entrances to cities, and urged them to turn their ceasefire into a permanent peace.

Governors and senior government officials hosted small feasts, played music to welcome the militants, coinciding with the close of the month-long Ramadan fasting season.