

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey (Reuters) – Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants launched a rocket attack on military vehicles on Wednesday, killing two soldiers and wounding another, the local governor's office said, the latest in a series of attacks in southeast Turkey this week. The attacks come ahead of nationwide elections on Sunday and coincide with an upswing in Turkish air strikes targeting PKK bases in northern Iraq, notably its stronghold in the Qandil mountain region. Ankara has recently stepped up warnings of a potential ground offensive into the Qandil region, where high-ranking PKK members are believed to be located. President Tayyip Erdogan has vowed to "drain the terror swamp" there.

No wealth is more useful than intelligence and wisdom; no solitude is more horrible than when people avoid you on account of your vanity and conceit or when you wrongly consider yourself above everybody to confide and consult.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Despite UN Resolution

Zionist Regime Keeps Expanding Settlements



A Palestinian man tries to stop work by an Israeli bulldozer during a protest outside the village of Deir Qadis, near the West Bank city of Ramallah, Wednesday, July 13, 2016.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – UN Middle East coordinator, Nickolay Mladenov has submitted a report to the Security Council, detailing Tel Aviv's construction activities from March 26 to June 12.

The report is published every four months to recount the implementation of Resolution 2334.

"As detailed in the report, no steps were taken during the reporting period to cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem [al-Quds]

as demanded by the resolution," he said.

Mladenov said some 3,500 housing units in settlements in the so-called Area C of the occupied West Bank had even been either "advanced, approved or tendered."

The Area C is the largest division in the occupied territory as it comprises 60 percent of the land. The Zionist regime has subjected it to full military control.

The report, meanwhile, said that during the period covered, the oc-

cupying regime's authorities had demolished or seized 84 Palestinian-owned structures, resulting in the displacement of 67 people and potentially affecting the livelihoods of 4,500 others.

"The need to reverse, or at the very least contain the impact of negative trends - especially illegal settlement activity, violence and incitement - is critical not only to preserve hope for a meaningful return to the negotiating table, but also to prevent the escalation of broader regional ten-

sions," the official noted.

The Zionist regime occupied the West Bank and East al-Quds during the Six Day War in 1967. It later annexed East al-Quds in a move not recognized by the international community.

Now, about 600,000 Zionist live in over 230 settlements built illegally since the occupation.

The council approved Resolution 2334 on December 23, 2016 by a vote of 14-0 when former American president Barack Obama's administration abstained, stopping short of vetoing the anti-Israel document in a rare move.

The resolution states that "it will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem [al-Quds], other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations."

Mladenov further said the reporting period was characterized by high levels of violence, the UN's website reported on its news section.

Israeli violence has killed more than 130 people since March 30, when Palestinians began holding peaceful March of Return protests on a weekly basis in support of their right to go back to their homeland.

"I want to again reiterate the call of the Secretary-General on all to unequivocally condemn, in the strongest possible terms, all actions that have brought us to this dangerous place and led to the loss of so many lives in Gaza," he said.

In 1st Attack Since Ceasefire

Taliban Kill 30 Afghan Soldiers

KABUL (Dispatches) – Taliban militants killed 30 Afghan soldiers and captured a military base in the western province of Badghis on Wednesday, the provincial governor said, their first major attack since a ceasefire for the Eid al-Fitr holiday.

The three-day Taliban ceasefire ended on Sunday.

Provincial governor Abdul Ghafoor Malikzai said the Taliban attacked two security posts in the early hours. Abdul Aziz Bek, head of the Badghis provincial council, said one military base was targeted, in the district of Balamerghab.

"Large numbers of Taliban came from several directions," Bek said. "After hours of heavy fighting 30

Afghan security forces were killed and the Taliban captured the base."

Fifteen Taliban were killed in other areas of the province overnight, he said, adding that the militants prepared their attacks and did reconnaissance of the area during their ceasefire.

The Taliban said heavy fighting was continuing and that so far "tens" of soldiers had been killed.

Naqibullah Amini, spokesman for the Badghis police, confirmed the death of 30 soldiers and said the Taliban killed four soldiers in separate attacks on security checkpoints in the same district.

The government also called a ceasefire for the holiday and Tali-

ban fighters headed into cities across the country over the weekend as both sides celebrated the end of the fasting month of Ramadan.

President Ashraf Ghani extended his unilateral ceasefire, initially due to end on Wednesday, by 10 days.

Some have criticized his ceasefire, which allowed the Taliban to freely enter government-held areas, including the capital, Kabul.

The Taliban announced the end of the ceasefire on Sunday, though Afghan President Ashraf Ghani extended his government's own unilateral truce for ten days.

The government's ceasefire is due to end later on Wednesday.

During the ceasefire, the Taliban militants headed into cities across the country, including Kabul, and celebrated the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. Some, however, criticized the government, arguing that the militants took advantage of the lull in fighting to prepare new attacks as they were allowed into the cities without being checked.

"The consequences could be disastrous," said a senior Western diplomat in Kabul.

The Taliban have been fighting against the government since their five-year rule over the country came to an end with the U.S.-led invasion in 2001.

HRW:

Saudi Arabia Arrests More Women's Rights Activists

RIYADH (Reuters) – Saudi Arabia detained two more women's rights advocates earlier this month and imposed a travel ban on several others in an ongoing crackdown in the conservative Muslim kingdom, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on Wednesday.

The arrests, just weeks before the much-hyped lifting of a decades-old ban on women driving, have revived criticism of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's approach to ambitious reforms as part of his push to diversify the world's oil exporter's economy.

The powerful young heir apparent is trying to open up the kingdom by easing strict social rules, but reforms hailed as proof of a new trend have been accompanied by a crackdown on dis-

sent, souring that image.

Activists and diplomats have speculated that the new wave of arrests may be aimed at appeasing conservative elements opposed to reforms and that it may be a message to activists not to push demands out of sync with the government's own agenda.

HRW said the authorities had arrested writer and activist Nouf Abdelaziz on June 6 after she expressed solidarity with seven activists detained in May.

Mayaa al-Zahrani was arrested after she reportedly posted a letter online that Abdelaziz asked her to make public in case of her arrest, HRW said, adding that both women are being held incommunicado.

Many of those detained in May were women who previously campaigned for the right to drive. The authorities accused them of suspicious contacts with "enemies overseas" and said more suspects were being sought.

In total around 12 prominent activists have been detained since May, according to their associates, drawing expressions of concern from the UN human rights office. Some were later released.

Those still in detention include Loujain al-Hathloul, Eman al-Nafjan, and Aziza al-Yousef plus the men Ibrahim al-Modaimegh, Mohammad al-Rabea and Abdulaziz al-Meshaal.

A government communications office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

'Saudi-Backed Forces Claim Control of Hudaydah Airport'



Yemen's Houthi fighters are seen during a gathering to mobilize more fighters to the battlefield to fight pro-government forces, in the Red Sea port city of Hudaydah on June 18, 2018.

ADEN (Dispatches) – Fears of a humanitarian crisis in Yemen's main port city Hudaydah grew as battles spilled into residential districts on Wednesday after Arab coalition forces seized the airport from the Houthi fighters.

Residents said coalition aircraft were bombing Houthi positions on roads leading to the airport as the group dug in against an onslaught by the Arab alliance to take the city, the Houthis' main port and the lifeline for millions of Yemenis.

Brigadier Abdul Salaam al-Shehi, a Saudi-led coalition commander in Yemen's Red Sea coast, said in a video posted by the UAE's official WAM news agency on Wednesday that the Hudaydah airport is "completely cleared" and "under control."

However, Mohammad al-Bukhaiti, a top figure in the Houthi movement's Supreme Political Council, had early on Wednesday rejected reports of the airport's seizure by the Saudi-led aggressor.

Shehi's remarks came one day after the Saudi-led troops announced that they had entered the main compound of the Hudaydah airport amid a military offensive to capture the flashpoint port city.

The Hudaydah airport lies just eight kilometers from the city's port, through which three-quarters of Yemen's imports pass, providing a lifeline for millions of people.

Syrian Army Steps Up Attacks in Southwest

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – The Syrian army stepped up shelling of opposition-held parts of the southwest as it mobilizes for a campaign to regain the area bordering Jordan and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, opposition sources said.

Violence erupted at the frontline town of Kafr Shams, near the Syrian-held Golan Heights, and further east in the town of Busra al Harir, which was struck by dozens of mortars from nearby army positions, the sources said.

Syrian state media said terrorists had escalated attacks on civilians in the area which is part of a "de-escalation" zone agreed by the United States and Russia last year with the aim of containing the conflict in the southwest.

An offensive in the southwest would risk a major escalation of the seven-year-old war. The area is of strategic importance to the Zionist regime. Washington has warned it will take "firm and appropriate measures" in response to violations

Since Saturday, the so-called coalition has announced a number of times that they had managed to fully capture the airport, but each time it was revealed that the airport was still in the hands of Houthi fighters and Yemeni troops, and that the compound was only within the reach of repeated air raids.

After nearly a month of sporadic clashes between Houthi forces and the coalition, coupled with Hadi's militia, in the volatile province of Hudaydah, the latter two launched a major offensive on June 13 to take the Houthi-held Hudaydah, a densely-populated city and the war-torn country's most vital port which is the entry point for 70 percent of the impoverished country's imports.

Saudi Arabia and its allies launched the war on Yemen in March 2015 to reinstall the former Saudi-backed Hadi regime.

The Yemeni Ministry of Human Rights announced in a statement on March 25 that the war had left 600,000 civilians dead and injured until then. The war and an accompanying blockade have also caused famine across Yemen.

The Houthi movement, which is a significant aid to the Yemeni army in defending the country against the invading forces, has been running state affairs in the absence of an effective administration during the past three years.

of the "de-escalation" deal. Terrorists have boosted their numbers in the area.

Elite government troops known as the "Tiger" force, which have spearheaded a campaign that recaptured the Eastern Ghouta region near Damascus, have also been mobilized for the attack.

The pro-Damascus newspaper al-Watan said there were "growing indications about preparations for the start of a wide military operation to liberate" the south.

In another development in Syria, the U.S.-led coalition in Syria said on Tuesday it had disrupted Daesh terrorist group's funding by killing the man who ran its oil and gas network and other members of the group last month.

"The death of these (Daesh) members hinders the terrorist group's ability to finance operations throughout Iraq and Syria ... the ability to pay fighters, procure weapons, and maintain equipment will be degraded," it said in a statement.