

Bahraini Clerics Urge Boycott of 'Fake' Elections

MANAMA (Press TV) – Bahraini clerics have denounced the planned parliamentary elections as “a sham,” saying such a vote in a kingdom, which has stripped a majority of its people of their basic rights, will fail to deceive the world’s public opinion.

In a statement carried by Arabic-language Lua TV network, the clergymen highlighted the Manama regime’s oppressive policies against the entire Bahraini nation, including the majority Shia Muslims as well as the Sunnis.

They said the Al Khalifah regime “cannot fool anyone in the world” by holding “fake” and “unacceptable” elections. The ruling system in Bahrain, the statement said, is based on denying people their rights, undermining the role of their lawmakers and suppressing the kingdom’s political majority.

The clerics also called for a boycott of the elections slated for November 24.

Casting votes in next month’s elections would amount to “oppression against the Muslim nation,” the statement read, urging people to continue their resistance in the face of the Manama regime’s campaign of suppression against critical voices.

Bahrain’s main Shia opposition group, the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, which was dissolved by the ruling regime in 2016, has already announced a boycott of the polls.

Shia opposition parties similarly boycotted the 2014 elections and described them as a farce.

Since February 2011, Bahraini people have been holding peaceful protest rallies regularly, demanding that the Al Khalifah family relinquish power and let a just system representing all



The image provided by an unnamed activist shows Bahraini security forces during a raid on a sit-in, in Diraz, Bahrain, May 23, 2017.

Bahrainis be established.

They have also been complaining against widespread discrimination against the Shia majority in the kingdom.

Manama has responded to the demonstrations with an iron fist.

The authorities have detained human rights campaigners, broken up major opposition political parties, revoked the nationality of several pro-democracy activists and deported those left stateless.

Turkey... (Continued From Page One)

that spoke to MEE, the 15 Saudis checked into separate hotel rooms from which police have been able to obtain fingerprints, the sources said.

The police are investigating guests, particularly Arabs, who stayed at both hotels during the same time period, though many are thought to have been in Turkey for plastic surgery operations.

Turkish police forces have also expanded their investigation and are now reviewing footage from cameras in front of the Emirati and Egyptian consulates in Istanbul to see if there was any interaction with Saudi officials of interest, the sources said.

Turkish media published images Wednesday of the 15-member Saudi “assassination squad” and video of suspicious movements at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Saudi Arabia remained silent as the images played across television networks in Turkey and around the world. Turkish officials fear the team killed Khashoggi, who wrote critically of the Saudi crown prince.

Saudi Arabia has offered no evidence to support its contention that the writer left the consulate unharmed and vanished into Istanbul while his fiancée waited impatiently outside. Politicians in the United States, Riyadh’s main ally, have warned that any harm done to the Washington Post contributor will jeopardize America’s relations with the world’s largest oil exporter.

State-run broadcaster TRT aired video purportedly showing the Saudis arriving by private jet and then leaving a hotel. The footage shows Khashoggi entering the consulate on Oct. 2.

An hour and 54 minutes later, according to the time stamp, a black Mercedes Vito with diplomatic license plates, which resembled a van parked outside of the consulate when the writer walked in, drives some 2 kilometers to the consul’s home, where it parks inside a garage.

The footage all seemed to come from surveillance cameras, which would have been posted throughout the district housing the Saudi consulate and other diplomatic missions. No one has produced any such footage of Khashoggi leaving the consulate.

Turkey’s Hurriyet newspaper and other media alleged Wednesday that the Saudi consulate’s 28 local staff were given leave on Oct. 2 on grounds that a “diplomats’ meeting” would be held there on that day.

The Sabah newspaper, which is close to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, published images of what it referred to as the “assassination squad” apparently taken at passport control. It said they checked into two hotels in Istanbul on Oct. 2 and left later that day.

Turkey’s private NTV news channel identified one member of the 15-member team as the head of a Saudi forensic science agency. It said he may have been responsible for cleaning up any incriminating evidence.

Khashoggi had written a series of columns for the Washington Post that were critical of Saudi Arabia’s assertive Prince Muhammad, who has led a widely publicized drive to purportedly reform the Wahhabi monarchy but has also presided over the arrests of activists and businessmen.

Erdogan has not accused Saudi Arabia of being responsible for Khashoggi’s disappearance but has said that if the Saudis have footage of him leaving the consulate they should release it.

Saudi Arabia is a major investor in Turkey, despite Ankara’s support for the Persian Gulf nation of Qatar, which is under a blockade led by Saudi Arabia and three other Arab nations.

Police and investigators in Turkey typically release video and information through state-run or otherwise government-friendly media outlets.

On Wednesday, the Post published a column by Khashoggi’s fiancée, Hatice Cengiz. She said the writer first visited the consulate on Sept. 28 “despite being somewhat concerned that he could be in danger.” He later returned Oct. 2 after being promised the necessary paperwork so the two could be married.

Khashoggi had sought to become a U.S. citizen after living in self-imposed exile since last year, fearing repercussions for his criticism of the prince, Cengiz wrote.

Trump, who took his first overseas trip as U.S. president to the kingdom and whose son-in-law Jared Kushner has close ties to Prince Muhammad, said Tuesday he had not yet talked to the Saudis about Khashoggi, “but I will be at some point,” without elaborating.

Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Hami Aksoy said Tuesday that Saudi authorities have notified Ankara that they were “open to cooperation” and would allow the consulate building to be searched. It’s unclear when such a search would take place.

Embassies and consulates under the Vienna Convention are technically foreign soil and must be protected by host nations.

Iran... (Continued From Page One)

Qasemi said that to “help protect the basic fundamentals of international law and to fight various forms of terrorism, the Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its right to follow up on the issue through legal and political channels and will implement a proper decision in due time.”

Germany extradited to Belgium an Iranian diplomat suspected of plotting a bomb attack in France, prosecutors said on Tuesday. Back in June, Belgian authorities said that the Iranian diplomat had been arrested along with a 38-year-old man and a 33-year-old woman, suspected of plotting a bomb attack on the MKO meeting in Paris.

Senior Iranian officials have dismissed the claims against the diplomat, saying they were part of a plot to harm Iran-Europe ties as the two sides seek to bolster cooperation.

Qasemi once again on Wednesday voiced Iran’s deep regret and dissatisfaction over the German government’s extradition and pledged the Islamic Republic’s determination to the plot behind the diplomat’s arrest and extradition.

Iran “will firmly and through diplomatic channels follow up on the case of this diplomat, who has fallen prey to a plot by those opposing further constructive ties between Iran and Germany and other European countries, until the truth will out and until the clarification of the terrorist groups’ malicious move,” he said.

The anti-Iranian currents in the European countries have a long history of terrorist activities and it is not so difficult for them to design such scenarios, he added.

Traders... (Continued From Page One)

“There will be some Iranian exports but the amount will depend on the price. If oil goes up to \$100 a barrel then waivers, if it stays around \$80 a barrel then no waivers,” the chief executive of Gunvor, Torbjorn Tornqvist, said.

Uncertainty surrounding Iran’s oil industry ahead of forthcoming U.S. sanctions could prompt “extreme volatility” for oil prices, BP’s chief executive told CNBC Wednesday.

“I think it’s going to be 45 days of extreme volatility, it could spike up, it could also go the other way,” he told CNBC’s Steve Sedgwick in London.

It’s hard to be precise over how much of Iran’s production will be affected by the sanctions. It largely depends on whether the country’s oil-buying customers are afraid of secondary sanctions from the U.S. if they do business with Iran.

BP and Serica Energy were granted a new license Tuesday to run a North Sea gas field partly owned by Iran showing the U.S. is willing to make some exemptions to the reach of the sanctions.

“If waivers were granted to others, to big oil consuming countries, you could see it (the price) go down, there’s a lot of uncertainty right now,” Dudley said.

On Wednesday, Brent crude futures were trading at \$84.96 per barrel while U.S. West Texas Intermediate was trading at \$74.92. President Donald Trump has called on OPEC to increase production to mitigate any Iranian shortfall and impact on prices. Saudi Arabia, the de-facto leader of OPEC, says it has the spare capacity to fulfill any shortfall created by Iran, but Iran has disputed that.

Erdogan... (Continued From Page One)

said in June that Iraq was surprised by Turkey’s decision to start holding back water behind its Ilisu dam earlier than promised, suggesting it was done to win support for the government in upcoming elections.

The next war in the Middle East could be fought over water as Iraq, Syria and Turkey scramble to assert claims to two vital rivers that run through the region, according to a new report. Nabil al-Samman, a Syrian expert on international waters, made the case for an upcoming “water war” in an article published by Saudi newspaper Asharq al-Awsat.

The article defines the term as being used to refer in the Mediterranean to “the use of water as a weapon in order to control its sources, or the diversion of water as a commercial commodity controlled by powerful upstream states for political ends.”

The piece outlines a decades-long history of difficult relations and devastating conflicts that have set the stage for a potential upcoming crisis between Syria, Iraq and Turkey.

“When the sounds of guns and war drums fade in Syria and Iraq, new tensions may arise because of water, especially in their conflict with Turkey, from which the Euphrates and Tigris rivers flow,” the report read.

Scores Dead, Missing as Migrant Boat Sinks Off Western Turkey

ANKARA (Reuters) – Eight people died after a boat filled with migrants sank off the western coast of Turkey and another 25 were missing, the Turkish coast guard said on Wednesday.

It was not clear where the boat was headed or where it left from. Hundreds of thousands of migrants crossed the sea channel from Turkey to Greek territory in 2015 before Ankara curbed the flow under a deal it struck with

the European Union.

The coast guard said the boat sank off the coast of Turkey’s Izmir province after water began leaking shortly after its departure. There were initially around 35 migrants on the boat in total, the coast guard said in a statement.

Search and rescue operations for the missing migrants were continuing, the coast guard added.

One helicopter, an aircraft and

three boats were carrying out the operations off the coast of Izmir’s Karaburun district, it said, adding that gendarme and security forces were also carrying out efforts on the ground.

Turkey became one of the main launch points for more than a million migrants taking the sea route to EU territory in 2015, many fleeing conflict and poverty in the Middle East and Africa.

The influx of migrants was

drastically curtailed by a 2016 accord between Ankara and the EU, after hundreds died crossing to Greek islands a few miles off the Turkish shore.

Mediterranean arrivals to the bloc, including refugees making the longer and more perilous crossing from North Africa to Italy, totaled 172,301 in 2017, down from 362,753 in 2016 and 1,015,078 in 2015, according to United Nations data.

Jordan Says Reopening Crucial Syria Trade Route Needs More Talks



Syrian forces of President Bashar al Assad are seen in the Nassib border crossing with Jordan in Deraa, Syria July 6, 2018.

AMMAN (Dispatches) – Jordan says more talks with Syria are needed before an important border crossing shut for three years as a result of its neighbor’s war can reopen to serve regional trade.

The closure of the Nassib crossing in 2015 cut a crucial transit route for hundreds of trucks a day transporting goods between Turkey and the Persian Gulf, and Lebanon and the Persian Gulf, in multi-billion-dollar annual trade.

Damascus, which retook the crossing from the opposition last July, hopes to reopen the Nassib route because it is vital to its hopes of reviving Syria’s shattered economy and rebuilding in territory under its control.

But Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said technical committees between the two countries which began talks in the middle of September were still working out the practical arrangements.

“The border will open after the technical committees end all the necessary arrangements and measures needed to guarantee opening the borders serves the common interests of the two countries,” Safadi said after talks with his Lebanese counterpart.

Western diplomatic sources say staunch U.S. ally Amman is resisting Russian pressure to open the crossing as this would help Damascus show the war is ending and hand President Bashar al-Assad another major gain.

Backed by Iran and Russia, Assad’s army has retaken control of most of Syria.

Jordan has denied it agreed on a date to reopen the crossing after Syria announced on Sept. 29 that movement of traffic and goods had begun. Syria retracted that announcement later that day, saying it would reopen on Wednesday October 10.

Diplomats and officials have privately said the move appeared to signal mounting pressure by Damascus on Amman to speed up the opening of the crossing. Earlier, the Syrian authorities had said they had rehabilitated the crossing and it was ready to receive Syrian refugees.

MERS Outbreak in Saudi Arabia Claims at Least 4 Lives

DUBAI (Sputnik) – An outbreak of the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) in Saudi Arabia has resulted in the deaths of four people over the last two weeks, local media has reported, citing the Saudi Health Ministry.

The ministry also said that one patient, a man from the central region of Al-Qassim, had recovered from the disease during this period, according to the Saudi Gazette

newspaper.

Last week, the World Health Organization (WHO) said that 10 people had died among 32 infected with MERS in Saudi Arabia since June.

MERS is a viral respiratory disease with a high mortality rate. At least 800 people of 2,254 confirmed cases have died of the virus, associated with camels, since the global MERS pandemic started in 2012, according

to the WHO.

The virus is transmitted from camels to people, with limited human-to-human transmission, according to the World Health Organization. The infection causes such symptoms as fever, cough and shortness of breath. There is currently no approved vaccine for MERS. People with chronic illnesses or a weak immune system are at a higher risk of contracting the viral respiratory disease.