

President Assad:

Syria Reconstruction to Cost \$400bn

DAMASCUS (Press TV) – Syria's President Bashar al-Assad predicts that Syria's reconstruction will cost between \$250 billion and \$400 billion, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov has said after meeting with the Syrian head of state.

Borisov's office said that the diplomat had discussed industrial, medical, and energy cooperation with Assad in Damascus on Thursday, as a years-long fight against foreign-backed terrorists nears its end.

"The range of questions discussed with the Syrian leader included political affairs, Russia's participation in Syria's postwar reconstruction and restoration of life to normal, and cooperation in industry, medicine, energy and other branches of the economy," Borisov's office said.

Syria has been able to purge Daesh and other terrorist groups from most of the country with support from Iran and Russia as well as the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah.

The war, which began in March 2011, has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians and dislocated thousands more while destroying most of the country's infrastructure and industrial capacity.

Borisov said it was critical for Damascus to maximize the effectiveness of its planning by using the existing

capacities in order to create the required financial and economic mechanisms.

He noted that Syria didn't have much time to begin the process as vestiges of what was once a united front against the government could still pose a threat by recruiting people.

"We've got to act fast, because any delays in economic recovery will be fraught with serious problems, including an upsurge in the activity of defeated terrorists. Extremists would find it far easier to recruit supporters from the class of impoverished people unable to support their families," Borisov said.

Borisov leads a Russian delegation that is in Damascus for a meeting of the permanent Russian-Syrian commission for trading, economic, scientific and technical cooperation.

Russia, China abstain in UN vote on Syria cross-border aid

Also on Thursday, Russia and China refused to vote on United Nations Security Council resolution that sought to extend approval for cross-border humanitarian aid deliveries to Syrian territories that were controlled by terrorists back in 2014, when the resolution was first adopted.

Vassily Nebenzia, Russia's Ambassador to the UN, said the text of the resolution -- drafted by Sweden and Kuwait-- was outdated and "divorced



Syrian refugees check the damage following a fire that ripped through their camp in the village of Yammouneh in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley, December 3, 2018.

from reality" because the situation in Syria had changed drastically.

"The fact that the stabilizing trends are strengthening in Syria is undeniable ... Despite remaining problems there are positive steps in improving the humanitarian situation," Nebenzia said.

The Russian envoy said the UN needed to help Damascus speed up its recovery process instead.

"This is a critical moment and the international community needs to now give a helping hand to the Syrians in order to overcome the devastation and making sure that people who voluntarily decided to return can live normally," he

added. Western countries, however, have made it clear that they will not approve reconstruction funding for Syria, or remove sanctions on the Assad government unless a political solution is reached.

Despite running an aerial campaign that allegedly targets terrorists, the US and its allies have been openly supporting militant groups fighting Assad's government, often helping them by targeting Syrian forces. Washington has repeatedly stressed that Assad must step down as part of any political solution.

Amid Rage Against Price Hikes

Yellow Vest Protests Reach Occupied Palestine

AL-QUDS (Dispatches) – People were set to hold French-style protests in Tel Aviv and the occupied al-Quds against the rising living costs on Friday.

Inspired by 'Yellow Vest' protests in France, organizers of the demonstration called on protesters to show up in city centers wearing yellow fluorescent traffic safety vests similar to what French demonstrators have worn in recent weeks in their protests against the high cost of living.

The protests were organized following the news of yet another wave of upping the prices. Tel Aviv has suggested 8% rise in the price of electric power, 4.5% in the cost of

water services and a 2%-4% increase in the cost of basic food-stuffs sold by major supermarket chains.

"As in France, Israel does not remain uncaring when faced with the news of yet another wave of upping the cost of living, which will make our lives here much harder," the organizers said in a press release.

"We Israelis are sick and tired of paying the cost of corruption and massive profits made by tycoons. We've had enough," it added.

"The time has come to learn from the French. We're done being nice," the statement noted.

Several Zionist politicians have

expressed their support for the protest movement, including Yair Lapid, the opposition Yesh Atid party chairman and former finance minister.

A photograph of Lapid wearing a yellow vest was released on social media on Wednesday by those who support the protest with no relation to Lapid or his party.

Zionist Union MK Itzik Shmuli, one of the leaders of a wave of cost-of-living protests in the occupied territories in 2011, and his party colleague Eitan Cabel have convened a session of the Knesset's Economic Affairs Committee next week on to address the pending price hikes.

In 2012, several protesters, including an Armed Forces' veteran, died after setting themselves on fire in a desperate act of protest at the high cost of living in the occupied territories.

The Friday's copycat protests were organized as thousands of demonstrators wearing yellow vests have been gathering in French cities since November 17. They initially began protesting controversial fuel tax and the high costs of living. The demonstrations, however, continued even after President Emmanuel Macron scrapped the plan to increase prices.

Yemenis ...

(Continued From Page One)

The Houthi movement views the truce deal a defeat for the Saudis as it stops the aggression, allows existing local protectors who thwarted the Saudi offensive to be in charge of the city, and allows the Yemeni nation to regain their access to food, medicine, and other basic supplies.

In his remarks, Abdulsalam said there is no sign that the Saudis are going to stop their aggression against the innocent people of Yemen despite the ceasefire deal.

One of the articles of the draft agreement proposed by the Houthi delegation is "the complete cessation of military actions in Yemen," but the Saudi side is rejecting it, he said.

Abdulsalam also called on the Yemenis to remain vigilant, especially in Hudaydah and Tai'z, and continue supporting the Yemeni army and popular committees.

"Those who have shown resistance against 17 countries for four years can achieve a brilliant victory," he added.

The U.S. Senate on Thursday voted to stop U.S. armed forces from supporting Saudi Arabia in its military aggression against Yemen.

The U.S. Department of Defense said it has sent Saudi Arabia and its main partner, the United Arab Emirates, a \$331-million bill for the fuel their warplanes have received from American refueling aircraft during the past four years in the Yemen war.

"Due to errors in accounting by the Pentagon, the United States had not properly charged Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for those services," Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the senior Democrat on the Armed Services Committee, said in a statement.

Palestinian ...

(Continued From Page One)

The West Bank-based Palestinian Authority has blamed Israel's illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories for the renewed tensions.

On Thursday, Zionist PM Benjamin Netanyahu pledged to authorize new settlement units, asking attorney general Avichai Mendelblit to facilitate their construction.

Around 600,000 Zionists live in settlements in the occupied West Bank. All Israeli settlements are considered illegal under the international law.

The Israeli premier also warned that the regime will "take action" against Hamas if the movement does not end "security operations" in the West Bank, Israel Hayom daily reported.

The Al Aqsa satellite channel also cited Hamas as marking 31 years since its establishment with a pledge to continue its legitimate right to confront the Israeli occupation.

In the Gaza Strip, thousands of Palestinians gathered Friday along the fence separating the besieged enclave from the occupied territories.

Gaza health officials said 75 people were wounded by Israeli live fire during the weekly protests.

Gaza's health ministry said more than 220 Palestinians had been killed by Zionist troops since March at protests demanding an end to an Israeli blockade of the coastal strip.

Middle ...

(Continued From Page One)

The measure is largely symbolic, however, and Trump has continued to defend the U.S. alliance with Saudi Arabia, indicating in an interview on Tuesday that he intended to "stand by" the crown prince.

"MBS asked his task force to study this proposal and he hinted that he liked the idea," the Saudi source told MEE, referring to the suggested meeting between the crown prince and Netanyahu.

"The task force agreed that without a major stunt, there is a real danger of a series of decisions from Congress that would fundamentally set back the Saudi-U.S. relationship, which is key for the crown prince."

The crown prince's inner circle is acutely aware of the damage being done to his image in Washington by near-daily negative front page reports in the U.S. media.

All on the task force agree that the furor over Khashoggi's murder is not a media bubble that will simply pop. They fear that the sense of anger and betrayal among Republicans on Capitol Hill, who had supported the crown prince as a reformer, is growing, the source said.

Nikki Haley, the outgoing U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, is the latest person to break ranks with the White House. Haley said on Wednesday that bin Salman was "responsible" for the murder of Khashoggi.

Haley, who is expected to step down from her role by the end of the year, said the Saudi government should not get "a pass".

"It was the Saudi government, and MBS is the head of the Saudi government," Haley told NBC News.

"So they are all responsible, and they don't get a pass, not an individual, not the government - they don't get a pass."

The proposal to stage a handshake with Netanyahu divided the task force, which includes Saudi intelligence, army, media and foreign office officials and political advisers.

"Some voiced concern about the consequences of this on the Arab and Muslim world," the source said.

The current formal position of the Arab League follows the Arab Peace Initiative announced by the late King Abdullah in 2002, which offers the occupying regime of Israel recognition and normalization from the Arab states only after a peace agreement is concluded between Israel and Palestine.

Others in the task force were more enthusiastic. "They thought that the Arab Spring is so divided, and that things are under control," said the source, referring to the political forces connected to the Arab Spring movement, who would object strongly to the normalizing of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The task force noted the absence of any real reaction on the Arab street to the recent visits of Netanyahu and Zionist ministers and athletes to the Persian Gulf states of Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Qatar.

They also thought they could control reaction inside the kingdom by "using the religious authorities to justify it," the source said.

"MBS is keen on the idea. He comes from a new generation and does not feel the weight of history on his shoulders. He has shown this repeatedly. He has no particular sympathy with the Palestinian cause," he said.

Jordanians Stage New Anti-Austerity Protests

AMMAN (Reuters) – Jordanian authorities have deployed hundreds of riot police in the capital and warned activists to stay within the law as hundreds of demonstrators have staged more protests against tough austerity measures backed by the International Monetary Fund.

Large demonstrations in the summer over an unpopular IMF-backed tax bill brought down the previous government.

Protesters have been holding sporadic demonstrations for the past two weeks and a judicial source said authorities

had detained several people for chanting slogans critical of King Abdullah as well as the government.

"(For) anyone who breaches the law there will be punishment," government spokeswoman Jumana Ghunaimat told reporters.

"There are those who want to sow destruction ... We must safeguard Jordan's stability and security," she said, adding that the government wanted dialogue.

The latest protests erupted after a largely pliant parliament last month approved

a tax bill widely seen as making few changes to the unpopular law scrapped after the summer demonstrations.

Many Jordanians say the government, which faces a record public debt of around \$40 billion and desperately needs to raise revenue, is eroding the disposable incomes of poorer and middle class Jordanians while letting the wealthy off the hook.

In a move to defuse tensions, King Abdullah ordered the government on Thursday to draft a general amnesty law

that pardons several thousand people jailed for convictions ranging from petty crime to embezzlement.

"This will contribute to easing pressures facing citizens," the monarch was quoted as saying in a royal palace statement.

The pardon excludes terror, treason and premeditated murder.

The protesters complain that Prime Minister Omar Razzaz, appointed by King Abdullah after the summer protests, has not delivered on promises to jail corrupt officials and businessmen.

Australia Warns Citizens Ahead of Embassy Move

CANBERRA (Dispatches) – Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison was expected Friday to announce a contentious decision whether or not to relocate the country's embassy in the Israeli-occupied territory from Tel Aviv to al-Quds.

In an address to the Sydney Institute, Morrison is expected to declare that his government will recognize the occupied city as the Zionist regime's so-called capital.

In May, U.S. President Donald Trump sparked international outrage when he relocated the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv.

Al-Quds was occupied by the Tel Aviv regime during the Six-Day War in the 1967, and is deemed the capital of a future Palestinian independent state.

Morrison, however, told reporters on Wednesday that it was yet premature to discuss the issue, saying, "When I'm in a position to make that announcement, I will."

Reports also said a possible recognition of al-Quds as the Zionist regime's "capital" would not be followed by an immediate embassy move due to cost issues.

The possible move, however, would draw backlash from neighboring

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation, and other Muslim majority nations.

On Friday, the Australian government warned its citizens to "exercise a high degree of caution" while travelling in Indonesia.

Scores of Australians preparing to travel to the tourist island of Bali and other tropical island destinations should "exercise a high degree of caution," the Department of Foreign Affairs warned in a public notice.

"Demonstrations have been held in recent weeks around the Australian Embassy in Jakarta and the Australian

Consulate-General in Surabaya," it said.

"Protests may continue at the Embassy in Jakarta or at any of Australia's Consulates-General in Surabaya, Bali and Makassar," the Department said.

The Indonesian government had reacted angrily last month, when Morrison initially suggested the idea of both recognizing the occupied city and moving the Australian embassy there.

In the meantime, Palestinian Ambassador to Australia Izzat Abdulhadi called on Muslim countries to apply "boycott measures" to Australia in reaction to the possible move.