

BASRA (Reuters) – Iraq's oil minister Thamer al-Ghadban has appointed a new head for the ministry's licensing and contracts office, which oversees oil contracts and negotiates energy deals with international companies, according to a ministry document reviewed by Reuters. Ali Maarij was named the new head of the licensing and contracts office, according to the document signed by Ghadban and dated Jan. 11. Maarij had previously served as head of Iraq's state-run Missan Oil Company until 2014 when he became a member of the Iraqi parliament. In 2018 he was appointed as an adviser at the oil ministry. The position has long been occupied by Abul Mahdi al-Ameedi who reached retirement age late last year, an oil ministry document showed.

He who is greedy is disgraced; he who discloses his hardship will always be humiliated; he who has no control over his tongue will often have to face discomfort.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

President Assad's Aide:

Trump Blindly Following Zionist Regime's Schemes



Bouthaina Shaaban, the political and media adviser to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Donald Trump, the president of the United States, is blindly undertaking the Zionist regime's schemes in the region, says the political and media adviser to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

"We have reached a stage where Trump is blindly working to fulfill the wishes of Zionism. Zionism sought to deal a blow to the axis of resistance by assassinating the two fighters. However, it

only consolidated the resistance front," Bouthaina Shaaban said in Damascus, condemning the assassination of Iran's Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and the second-in-command of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

She then cited a report published by the Israeli Haaretz daily that

Trump had informed Zionist regime officials of his intention to assassinate Soleimani without consulting Congress. "We are facing an act which Trump perpetrated simply to serve the interests of Israel."

The assassination of Soleimani was shocking, the Syrian official said, emphasizing that its repercussions will not be confined to days and months, but will rather last long.

"America took an action that will have adverse effects on the U.S. in all arenas. The United States proved itself to be a government that commits terrorist and criminal acts by the law of the jungle, and violates the constitution by skirting Congress," the high-ranking Syrian official said.

She also hailed a decision made by the Iraqi parliament concerning the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Iraq as well as Iran's precision firing of missiles at U.S. bases in Iraq.

On January 5, Iraqi lawmakers unanimously approved a bill demanding the withdrawal of all foreign military forces led by the United States from the country.

Iraqi caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi called on the United States on January 9 to dispatch a delegation to Baghdad tasked with formulating a mechanism for the pullout.

The prime minister said Iraq rejects violation of its sovereignty, particularly the U.S. military's violation of Iraqi airspace in the airstrike that assassinated Soleimani on January 3.

"The prime minister said American forces had entered Iraq and drones are flying in its airspace without permission from Iraqi authorities and this was a violation of the bilateral agreements," said a statement by the office of Iraq's prime minister.

Dozens of Civilians Leave Terrorist-Held Area in Aleppo



A man stares at the damage on the roof of a building that was hit by a rocket in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo on April 14, 2019.

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – Dozens of civilians have left the terrorist-held areas in Syria's Aleppo province through a humanitarian corridor set up recently by Russian and Syrian forces, state news agency SANA reported.

The civilians left on Monday via the al-Hadir crossing in the southern countryside of Aleppo, said the report.

Syrian helicopters on Sunday dropped leaflets in terrorist-held areas in Aleppo province in northern Syria, urging civilians in both Aleppo and Idlib provinces to leave the areas through the newly-opened humanitarian corridors.

The corridors are prepared for the civilians who are willing to leave terrorist-held areas to government-controlled ones in Idlib, which is part of the implementation of a truce in the region, a military source told Xinhua.

Russia's Defense Ministry had also said in a statement late on Sunday that civilians could leave a de-escalation zone in Syria's Idlib Province.

The ministry said it had received many requests from Syrian civilians in Idlib in areas controlled by terrorist groups to return to their homes in territory controlled by Syrian government forces.

All conflicting parties in the Syrian province of Idlib ceased military activities starting Sunday midnight.

The Turkish Defense Ministry said Russia and Turkey agreed to introduce a ceasefire in the province, starting at 0:00 local time (22:00 GMT) on 12 January.

The Syrian army started a military operation in southeastern Idlib on 19 December to clear the area of terrorists, including the Daesh and Tahrir al-Sham, formerly known as the Nusra Front. By 24 December, more than 40 villages in Idlib had been retaken by the government troops.

In their latest operation, the Syrian Army units thwarted attacks by Tahrir al-Sham terrorists in southeastern Idlib and inflicted heavy losses on the terrorists by destroying a large number of their armored vehicles and killing several of them.

Iraq: U.S. Seizure of Funds to Cause Economic 'Collapse'

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) -- Iraqi officials have warned of economic "collapse" if the United States makes good on its threat to cut off its access to a U.S.-based key bank account where oil revenues are kept.

President Donald Trump is angered by the Iraqi parliament voting on January 5 to oust all U.S. forces following Washington's assassination of Iran's General Qassem Soleimani and Iraq's Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

Trump has said if U.S. troops were asked to leave, he would charge the Iraqis "sanctions like they've never seen before." On Friday, he suggested blocking some \$35 billion of Iraqi money "right now sitting in an account" in the United States.

Agence France-Presse quoted two unnamed Iraqi officials as saying that Washington had delivered an extraordinary verbal message directly to the office of Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi.

The office "got a call threatening that if U.S. troops are kicked out, 'we' -- the U.S. -- will block your account at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York," one

official said.

Iraq is the second largest oil producer of OPEC and its oil revenues --which are paid in dollars into the Fed account daily-- fund 90 percent of the national budget.

"We're an oil-producing country. Those accounts are in dollars. Cutting off access means totally turning off the tap," the first Iraqi official said.

The second official said, "It would mean collapse for Iraq." He said the government would not be able to carry out daily functions or pay salaries, adding that such a move would prompt the Iraqi currency to fall in value.

The Central Bank of Iraq's account at the Fed was established in 2003 following the U.S. invasion that toppled ex-dictator Saddam Hussein. According to Iraqi officials the balance now is sitting at about \$35 billion.

Trump said Friday he had told Abdul-Mahdi that Iraq "should pay back the United States for its investments in the country over the past several years

or the American military will stay there," Fox News reported.

"If we leave ... you have to pay us for the money we put in," the U.S. president said.

Asked how he planned to collect money from Iraq, Trump said: "Well, we have a lot of their money right now. We have a lot of their money. We have \$35 billion of their money right now sitting in an account."

A third top Iraqi official acknowledged that Washington was mulling "restricting" cash access to "about a third of what they would usually send."

"You can imagine why, if troops were expelled, banks might be nervous about sending lots of... cash to Baghdad," the official said.

The U.S. threat comes even as the Federal Reserve Bank is supposed to be independent of foreign policy.

"The attempt to politicize dollar shipments has the Bank worried because it affects its prestige and integrity in dealing with clients," the State Department official said, adding "Trump is obviously willing to politicize everything."

Jordan King Warns Daesh on the Rise

AMMAN (Dispatches) – The Daesh terrorist group is once again on the rise in the Middle East, King Abdullah of Jordan has warned, saying that thousands of terrorists moved from Syria to Libya – bringing the whole problem even closer to Europe.

The revelation was made by the king during an exclusive interview with France 24 which aired on Monday.

The monarch said that his "major concern is that we have seen over the past year the re-

establishment and rise of Daesh, not only in southeastern Syria but also in western Iraq".

"We have to deal with the re-emergence of Daesh," he noted.

Ironically, the timeframe given by King Abdullah corresponds with the announcement of a decisive victory over Daesh by U.S. President Donald Trump, who repeatedly praised himself for the achievement in early 2019. After the alleged 'victory', however, the terrorist group is apparently on the rise again.

Moreover, thousands of mili-

tants have moved from Syria into another of the region's terrorist hotspots, the king stated, implying they were able to travel there through Turkey. Such a flow of terrorists brings the whole Middle Eastern mess significantly closer to the EU – and the bloc must deal with it as soon as possible.

"Several thousand militants have left Idlib through the northern border and have ended up in Libya; that is something that we in the region, and also our European friends, will have

to address in 2020," he stated.

The interview comes ahead of King Abdullah's EU tour, with the monarch scheduled to engage in talks in Brussels, Strasbourg and Paris later this week. The situation in Libya – and the inflow of terrorists the war-torn country endures – will be among the main topics of discussion with the European leaders.

"From a European perspective, with Libya being much closer to Europe, this is going to be an important discussion in the next couple of days," Abdullah said.

Severe Weather in Afghanistan, Pakistan Leaves 48 Dead

KABUL (TRT World) – Severe winter weather has struck parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, with heavy snowfall, rains and flash floods that left at least 48 people dead, officials say as authorities struggled to clear and reopen highways and evacuate people to safer places.

In Pakistan, where 30 people were reported killed, much of the damage struck southwestern Balochistan province. Imran Zarkon, chief of provincial disaster management, said 14 died there in the past 24 hours, mainly when roofs collapsed amid heavy snowfall.

Heavy snowfall forced closures of many highways and some parts in the province were under six inches of snow.

Eleven people were killed in eastern Punjab province, battered by heavy rains, and five others died in the Pakistani-administered part of Kashmir, officials with the state-run emergency service said.

The divided Himalayan region has witnessed heavy snowfall in recent days and power cuts have been reported. Emergency services said they were struggling to provide food and other items to snow-hit areas.

In Afghanistan, at least 18 people, including women and children, died on account of the

severe weather, according to provincial officials.

Hasibullah Shaikhani, a press officer with the state ministry for disaster management, said most of the highways in Afghanistan were closed due to heavy snowfall and fears of avalanches.

Of the Afghan casualties, eight people were killed in southern Kandahar province, said Bahir Ahamdi, spokesman for the provincial governor.

In western Herat province, seven people died, including five members of the same family, said Abdul Ahad Walizada, spokesman for the provincial police chief. Three people were killed in southern Helmand province, said Omar Zwak, spokesman for the provincial governor.

Residents of the Afghan capital, Kabul, where temperatures dropped to -15 degrees Celsius (5 degrees Fahrenheit), abandoned driving and struggled to get to work on snow-covered roads.

The United Nations had previously estimated that at least nine million Afghans are in need of humanitarian aid, including basic food and housing amid a drawn-out war that has so far displaced hundreds of thousands of people.