

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – Ministers from Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan say they will sign a final agreement by the end of February on the giant Blue Nile hydropower dam that sparked a years-long diplomatic crisis between Cairo and Addis Ababa.

In a joint statement with the United States and the World Bank after four days of talks in Washington, the nations said they had agreed on a schedule for staged filling of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and mitigation mechanisms to adjust the filling and operation of the dam during dry periods and drought.

One who says unpleasant things about others, will himself quickly become a target of their scandal.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Iraqi President Appoints Mohammed Allawi as New PM

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Iraqi President Barham Salih has appointed Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi as new prime minister, State TV reported, after squabbling political parties failed to name a candidate in the two months since the former premier was ousted by popular protests.

Allawi will run the country until early elections can be held. He must form a new government within a month.

Former Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi resigned in November amid protests where Iraqis took to the streets demanding better economic conditions.

Allawi was quoted by State TV as saying he would resign if political blocs sought to impose candidates for different ministries.

He also called on protesters to continue demonstrating until their demands are met.

The former communications minister served under ex-premier Nuri al-Maliki.



Iraqi President Barham Salih appointed Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi as the country's new prime minister on Feb. 1, 2020.

In late-December, Iraqi President Barham Salih refused to designate the city of Basra's governor as the new prime minister.

Iraq has been gripped by mass protests since October, when activists took to the streets to demand a change in the country's political system. More than 450

people have been killed in the protests since then.

Reports also emerged of instances of violence, including the closure of urban and inter-city roads by the protesters, who set objects ablaze in the course of moving traffic.

Abdul-Mahdi stepped down amid the rallies, but keeps func-

tioning as interim premier. The parliament also acknowledged the popular dissatisfaction, introducing an electoral law that allows voters to pick individual candidates instead of choosing from party lists.

Some protesters say the alleged corruption is to be traced back to a ruling elite's monopoly of power since the United States' 2003 invasion of the Arab country.

The rallies subsided after January 3, when the United States launched a set of drone strikes against Baghdad, assassinating senior Iraqi anti-terror commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), who was visiting Iraq on an official invitation, among others.

After the assassinations, the parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of a bill demanding expulsion of all U.S. forces.

Russian Envoy:

U.S. Sanctions Against Hezbollah Hurt Lebanon



The Russian Ambassador to Lebanon says U.S. sanctions against the Hezbollah resistance movement are hurting Lebanon amid its current crisis.

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – The Russian Ambassador to Lebanon says U.S. sanctions against the Hezbollah resistance movement are hurting Lebanon amid its current crisis, local media have reported.

"We should work on uniting the efforts of counties that are keen on keeping Lebanon away from conflicts because the country is currently experiencing a serious crisis," Alexander Zasytkin was quoted as saying by Elnashra, an online independent newspaper.

Zasytkin said Russia and France are keen to support Lebanon while the U.S. insists on taking measures against Hezbollah.

"We have to help Lebanon as a government; this is how we can support the country in overcoming its challenges," he said.

Lebanon has recently formed a cabinet supported by the Shia parties Hezbollah and Amal Movement, in addition to the Free Patriotic Movement.

Hezbollah was formed following the Zionist regime's inva-

sion of Lebanon and the ensuing occupation of its southern parts in the 1980s. It currently constitutes Lebanon's de facto military power.

Since then, the movement has helped the Lebanese national army retake the occupied regions from the occupying regime and thwart two Zionist acts of aggression in 2000 and 2006.

Hezbollah has also been playing a significant role in the Syrian army's fight against terrorist groups, including Daesh and al-Nusra Front, thus preventing the spillover of the war into Lebanon.

In May 2018, the U.S. and its regional partners – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE – imposed sanctions on Hezbollah leadership, targeting its Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah and Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Naim Qassem.

Some 50 Hezbollah individuals and entities have been blacklisted by the Treasury since 2017.

U.S., Zionist Regime Ramp Up Nuclear Weapons Testing, Deployment

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime says it has ramped up the deployment and testing of nuclear and nuclear-capable weapons amid heightened regional tensions after the U.S. assassinated top Iranian General Qassem Soleimani and unveiled a biased Middle East plan.

The regime's war ministry announced that it conducted a launch test of a "rocket propulsion system from a base in the center of the country (occupied territories)".

The ministry refused to disclose any additional details re-

garding the nature of the missile, contrary to its usual conduct following satellite launcher and missile interceptor tests.

The little information revealed about the test prompted speculation among observers that the tested projectile may have been related to the regime's long-range ballistic missile program, which it seeks to not acknowledge publicly.

Tel Aviv conducted a similar rocket engine test last December with Israeli media reporting that the test was meant to be a "show of force" of the occupying re-

gime's "nuclear deterrent system especially aimed at Iran".

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said last year that the Zionist regime is in possession of approximately 100 atomic warheads, noting that it has 30 gravity bombs which can be delivered by fighter jets – some of which are believed to be equipped for nuclear weapon delivery.

The regime has refused to allow inspections of its military nuclear facilities or sign the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear

Weapons (NPT).

The Federation of American Scientists also warned that Washington was deploying the recently developed W76-2 low-yield nuclear warhead as part of a new generation of less-destructive yet more "usable" nuclear weapons.

The authors of the report, military analyst William Arkin and Federation of American Scientists Nuclear Information Project director Hans Kristensen, warned that such weapons increase the likelihood of a nuclear armed conflict.

Saudi Ship Faces Growing Opposition in European Ports

RIYADH (Press TV) – Amnesty International says lawsuits and protests are planned in several European countries to oppose the voyage of a Saudi Arabian ship believed to be carrying a consignment of arms destined to be used in Saudi-led war against Yemen.

The Saudi owned cargo ship Bahri Yanbu, which is due to visit five European ports beginning on 2 February before continuing its onward voyage to Saudi Arabia, has previously ferried tens of millions of pounds' worth of arms to fuel the Yemen war.

Having already traveled across the Atlantic -- with earlier stops in the United States and Canada last month-- Bahri Yanbu is due to dock in the ports of Bremerhaven in Germany, Antwerp in Belgium, Tilbury Docks in the UK, Cherbourg in France, and Genoa in Italy.

"On a similar voyage in May 2019, protests and lawsuits blocked some of the arms destined for Yemen from being loaded on the Bahri Yanbu," Amnesty's Researcher on Arms Control, Security Trade, and Human Rights Patrick Wilcken said on Saturday.

"Even so, tens of millions of dollars' worth of military aircraft parts and other arms slipped through. Multiple states failed miserably to live up to their international obligations to halt arms transfers for use in war crimes and seri-

ous human rights violations."

"Now, the political will of governments to respect their legal obligations is again being put to the test. Activists and port workers are on high alert as the Bahri Yanbu threatens to flout international law yet again in the name of lucrative arms deals that have been fueling unlawful killing of civilians and a dire humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen," he added.

Back on May 20, Italian unions refused to load electricity generators onto the Bahri Yanbu vessel, saying the weapons on the Saudi ship contravened a United Nations treaty and might be used against civilians in Yemen.

Earlier that same month, the Bahri Yanbu vessel loaded arms in the Belgian city of Antwerp but was prevented from picking up another consignment of weapons in the French port of Le Havre following protests by humanitarian groups.

The move was prompted after the investigative website Disclose published leaked documents that showed Saudi Arabia was using French weapons including tanks and laser-guided missile systems, against civilians in Yemen.

The new round of opposition to the Bahri Yanbu's current voyage includes a dockworkers' strike in the Italian port city of Genoa, where trade unions have repeatedly voiced

their opposition to loading "hot cargo" destined for use in the war. Amnesty International Italy volunteers have also planned to protest in the port.

In Belgium, three NGOs have filed a court case seeking an injunction against the government authorizing arms transfers to Saudi Arabia.

Amnesty International France volunteers have also planned to protest in Cherbourg port. In December, Spanish peace groups staged a protest in eastern port of Sagunto, Valencia, against the presence of the Bahri Yanbu's sister ship, the Bahri Abha, which they suspected was carrying weapons from the United States to be used in Yemen.

They demanded the Spanish government prohibit the transit and loading in Spain of any weapons.

Port authorities said that the ship had carried out fully legal cargo operations but could not say what the ship was carrying or where it was headed.

The rights group said it was not clear if the ship was carrying arms in this voyage.

Given the secrecy surrounding the Bahri Yanbu's contents, Amnesty International lacks specific evidence indicating that it is currently carrying arms to Saudi Arabia.

Egypt Sentences Officer-Turned-Militant, 36 Others to Death

CAIRO (Dispatches) – An Egyptian court has sentenced Hisham al-Ashmawy, a former special forces officer turned militant, and 36 others to death after they were convicted of terrorism, court officials say.

Ashmawy was captured in the eastern Libyan city of Derna in late 2018 and transferred by authorities loyal to commander Khalifa Haftar to Egypt in May last year.

He was convicted on several charges including plotting a 2014 attack that killed 22 military guards near the frontier with Libya, and involvement in an attempt to kill a former interior minister in 2013, a military statement said.

Ashmawy led the Sinai-based Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, Egypt's most active militant

group, before it pledged allegiance to Daesh in 2014, it said.

The other 36 defendants tried with him were also convicted of terrorism charges, the court ruled.

Their cases were referred to the Grand Mufti. Egyptian law requires any capital sentence to be referred to him for an opinion before executions can take place.

The court set a new session for March 2 to confirm the convictions after receiving the Mufti's non-binding opinion.

In November, a military court had already sentenced Ashmawy to death in another terrorism case. Egyptian civilian and military courts had also sentenced Ashmawy to death in absentia before his extradition.