

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Iraqi authorities have reopened one of Baghdad's major bridges, shut for months by protesters, in a sign of a lull in unrest that forced the prime minister to resign last year.
The Sinak Bridge, one of the main routes across the Tigris River that bisects the city, leads to a district near the fortified Green Zone of government and diplomatic buildings.
It runs parallel to another major bridge, Al Jumhuriya, which connects the Green Zone itself to the main protest camp at Tahrir Square, and which remains shut.

The mind of a wise man is the safest custody of secrets; cheerfulness is the key to friendship; patience and forbearance will conceal many defects.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Palestinians Hail UN Report on Companies With Zionist Settlement Ties



The photo, taken on February 11, 2020, shows a view of the Zionist settlement of Maale Adumim in the occupied West Bank.

NEW YORK (Dispatches) – **The Palestinian foreign minister has hailed the release on Wednesday of a UN rights office report on companies with Zionist settlement ties and urged the international community to press the businesses to cut their links with the enclaves.** “The publication of the list of companies and parties operating in settlements is a victory for international law,” said a statement

issued by Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki’s office. Maliki urged UN-member states and the UN Human Rights council to “issue recommendations and instructions to these companies to end their work immediately with the settlements.” The United Nations human rights office has released a report identifying companies with business ties to Zionist settlements in

the occupied West Bank, a move hailed by Palestinians as a victory for international law. The office said in a statement on Wednesday that it had named 112 business entities, including 94 based in the occupied territories and 18 others in six different countries. It said it had reasonable grounds to conclude that the firms have ties with Zionist settlements.

“I am conscious this issue has been, and will continue to be, highly contentious,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on Wednesday. The office said, “While the settlements as such are regarded as illegal under international law, this report does not provide a legal characterization of the activities in question, or of business enterprises’ involvement in them.”

The move was hailed by the Palestinian foreign minister, who described it as a victory. “The publication of the list of companies and parties operating in settlements is a victory for international law,” Riyad al-Maliki’s office said in a statement. The minister also called on UN member states and the UN Human Rights council to “issue recommendations and instructions to these companies to end their work immediately with the settlements.”

The newly released report drew condemnation from Tel Aviv, with the occupying regime’s foreign minister Israel Katz saying in a statement, “The announcement by the UN Human Rights Office of the publication of a ‘blacklist’ of businesses is shameful capitulation to pressure from countries and organizations that are interested in hurting Israel.”

Iraq Gets Rid of U.S. Troops in Anti-Daesh Operations in Anbar



Iraqi government forces flash their weapons on March 10, 2016 after retaking a town from Daesh militants in Anbar Province.

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – **The Iraqi army has decided not to take assistance from the U.S. troops in operations against the Daesh terrorist group in al-Anbar province.** The Arabic-language service of Sputnik news agency reported that the first stage of operations to cleanse al-Anbar and rural areas at common borders between Iraq and Syria and Jordan started on Wednesday morning. A security source said the Iraqi army has filed no request for U.S.-led coalition experts to help them arm F-16 fighter jets with missiles, and used Iraqi technicians.

The source said that only the Iraqi forces take part in the operations and no foreign forces, specially the Americans, will be present in the battle. “The Iraqi army’s air force started the operations today with Sukhoi and F-16 fighter jets low altitude flights over al-Anbar province,” he added. The Iraqi security forces have launched a major operation to hunt down Daesh terrorists in Iraq’s Anbar and border areas with neighboring Syria and Jordan pm Wednesday, the

Iraqi military said. The Iraqi forces started at dawn the first phase of the major operation, dubbed Operation Heroes of Iraq, Abdul Amir Rasheed Yarallah, deputy commander of the Iraqi Joint Operations Command, said in a statement. The troops pushed in five routes to clear 26,238 square km of areas of the remnants of Daesh terrorists and to promote the stability across the province, the statement added. “Iraqi warplanes of F-16 and Sukhoi began flying at very low altitudes in the operation’s areas and nearby city centers in response to the requirements of ongoing operation,” the statement said without giving further details. Late in 2017, Iraq declared full liberation of its territories from Daesh terrorists after Iraqi forces seized the whole border areas with Syria and nearby desert in western Iraq. However, small groups or individuals of Daesh terrorists still try to infiltrate into Iraq from neighboring Syria through the roughly 600 km long border with vast rugged areas and desert land.

U.S., Taliban Could Sign Deal in February: Sources

KABUL (Dispatches) – **A U.S.-Taliban deal could be signed this month if the Taliban stop countering American troops militarily, which could lead to an eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, two Afghan government sources and a Western diplomat say.** The tentative timeline shared by sources on Wednesday came a day after Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said there had been a possible breakthrough in U.S.-Taliban talks in Qatar. The talks had been deadlocked in part over a U.S. demand that the militants agree to sharply

reduce its attacks against Americans as part of any American troop withdrawal accord. Suhail Shaheen, a spokesman for the Taliban’s political office in Qatar’s capital, Doha, said progress has been made, but refused to share further details. Doha has been the venue for talks between the warring sides since 2018 even as fighting has continued across the country, killing hundreds of civilians and soldiers as the Taliban have expanded their territorial control. A third Afghan official said the United States has agreed

in principle to a deal, but that it would not be signed until the Taliban stop its attacks as a show of the group’s opposition to foreign military presence. The deal could be signed as soon as this month, the official said, requesting anonymity. A Western diplomat in Kabul said U.S. negotiators were working on idea that the Taliban stop attacking foreign troops for at least 10 days. There are about 13,000 U.S. troops as well as thousands of other NATO troops in Afghanistan, 18 years after a U.S.-led coalition invaded the country.

The United States is aiming to reduce troop numbers to about 9,000, the diplomat said. The news of a potential agreement to stop attack against foreign targets comes as the militant group that controls about 40% of the country, according to Afghan defense officials. Last month the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, a U.S. government agency, assessed that there had been a record-high number of attacks carried out by the Taliban and other anti-government forces during the last three months of 2019.

Lebanese President Voices Optimism on New Cabinet

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – **Lebanese President Michel Aoun says that a new phase has begun in Lebanon after the new cabinet’s success in gaining a vote of confidence a day earlier, a statement by the president’s office reported.** “I am sure that Lebanon will get over its current crisis and restore its prosperity,” Aoun said during his meeting with Joseph Habis, Singapore’s honorary consul-general in Lebanon. Aoun assured that any official who has stolen money from the Treasury will be tried according to laws. “It is very important at this point to differentiate between the honest politicians and those involved in corruption,” Aoun said.

The Lebanese parliament threw its support behind the new cabinet led by Prime Minister Hassan Diab on Tuesday in a vote of confidence held amid ongoing protests over the country’s economic crisis. Sixty-three out of 84 Lebanese lawmakers voted to back the new administration after an eight-hour parliamentary session. The vote comes as Lebanon and the new government is facing one of the worst crises in the county’s recent history. “We have accepted to assume this mission amidst perilous circumstances and as the country endures an exceptional conjuncture,

all emanating from our national spirit,” Diab read from his new government’s policy statement after securing the confidence vote. “Lebanon is facing stifling and decisive crises, which require a major overhaul and action, including some agonizing measures,” he said. Diab also stressed that his new government -- made up of 20 specialist ministers backed by the country’s political parties -- would undertake fiscal and administrative reforms, fight corruption, tax evasion and smuggling, and seek to establish the independence of the judiciary within 100 days. The formation of the new government under Diab came after the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement and its allies agreed on a cabinet that must urgently address the economic crisis and ensuing protests that toppled its predecessor. The country had been without an effective government since Saad al-Hariri submitted his resignation as premier to Lebanon’s President Michel Aoun in October. Since October 17, Lebanon has been rocked by nationwide protests against rising inflation and living costs as the government struggles to attract investment amid increasing economic hardships and a decreasing capital flow to the country.

Lawyers Want UAE Officials Nabbed for War Crimes in Yemen

LONDON (Dispatches) – **A British law firm has filed requests with the authorities in Britain, the United States and Turkey to arrest senior officials from the United Arab Emirates for carrying out war crimes and torture in Yemen.** The complaints were filed by law firm Stoke White under the ‘universal jurisdiction’ principle that countries are obliged to investigate war crimes wherever they may have been carried out. The firm filed the complaints to Britain’s Metropolitan police and the U.S. and Turkish justice ministries on behalf of Abdullah Suliman Abdullah Daubalah, a journalist, and Salah Muslem Salem, whose brother was killed in Yemen. Lawyers for the men said in the complaint that the UAE and its “mercenaries” were responsible for torture and war crimes against civilians

in Yemen in 2015 and 2019. It named senior UAE political and military figures as suspects. A spokeswoman for the UAE declined immediate comment, as did a spokesman for London’s Metropolitan Police. There was no immediate reply to emails sent to the U.S. Justice Department and the Turkish embassy in London. “The case is filed against high ranking officials in the UAE government and ministry of defense, alongside the U.S. mercenaries who have acted under the direct orders of the UAE government,” said Hakan Camuz, head of international law at Stoke White. “We believe we have compelling legal grounds for authorities in the UK, U.S. and Turkey to investigate and prosecute under the universal jurisdiction laws,” Camuz said. He said his clients had fled Yemen for Turkey.

Some of the suspects live in the UAE and often travel to Britain and the United States, and others live in the United States. The UAE is a leading partner in a Saudi-led coalition that launched a war in Yemen in March 2015. Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched the devastating campaign against Yemen, with the goal of bringing the government of Hadi back to power and crushing Ansarullah. The U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past nearly five years. The UN says over 24 million Yemenis are in dire need of humanitarian aid, including 10 million suffering from extreme levels of hunger.