

RIYADH (Reuters) – Saudi health ministry affiliate says there are no cases of coronavirus in the kingdom, denying earlier reports of an expatriate resident being infected. Earlier, India's minister of state for external affairs said an Indian nurse working at a hospital in southwestern Saudi Arabia has been infected by the coronavirus and was being treated, amid an outbreak that has killed 17 people in China. But the Saudi Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a tweet that there were no cases of the novel coronavirus so far. The kingdom said on Wednesday it would start screening passengers arriving from China and take other preventive measures following the outbreak in the central Chinese city of Wuhan.

President Ghani:

Afghanistan Ready for Major U.S. Troop Reduction



This picture taken on June 6, 2019 shows U.S. troops looking out over hillsides in Nerkh district of the eastern Afghan province of Wardak.

DAVOS (Dispatches) – Afghanistan is prepared for a major reduction in United States troops in the country, President Ashraf Ghani says, adding that he has given that message to President Trump, a step toward winding down the costly American military presence as diplomats struggle to finalize a deal with the Taliban.

About 12,000 American troops remain in Afghanistan, down from a peak of about 100,000 eight years ago. A gradual reduction in United States troops in the country has taken place over the last year, despite the absence of a settlement emerging from negotiations in the Persian Gulf state of Qatar over the past year. U.S. President Donald Trump declared the

talks “dead” in September, just as the two sides were on the verge of finalizing an agreement. They later resumed, but have since stalled.

Ghani has been a vocal critic of the United States’ negotiations with the militants, because the talks have excluded his government. But speaking on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Thursday, he said he had told Trump that the Afghan government was ready for a further reduction of 4,000 American troops, one-third of those remaining.

“We are totally ready for a withdrawal of 4,000 troops anytime the president decides,” Ghani told reporters at the economic gathering, a day after he met with Trump.

American negotiators have been in Qatar for the past several weeks, trying to kickstart the stalled talks.

The U.S. invaded the Central Asian country after the September 11, 2001 attacks under the banner of seeking to fight “terror” thousands of kilometers away from its own borders.

The invasion deposed the Taliban, but the group has never ceased its operations across Afghanistan, and has vowed to keep up its attacks until the withdrawal of all U.S.-led forces.

The U.S. began negotiations with the militants under President Donald Trump. The Taliban, however, abandoned the talks, citing lack of resolve on the part of Washington to end the military intervention.

Syrians Protest Against Zionist Regime’s Plan for Golan



The residents of Syria’s Golan Heights stage a protest against Israeli plans to install wind turbines in the occupied territory, on January 24, 2020.

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – The residents of Syria’s Golan Heights have staged a protest against the Zionist regime’s plan to install wind turbines in the occupied territory, which they say would pave the way for the seizure of more land from them.

Syria’s official news agency SANA reported that protesters took to the streets of Majdal Shams on Friday and reiterated that they would defend the right to their land.

The occupying regime plans to install 46 wind turbines on an area of about 6,000 acres near the villages of Majdal Shams, Ein Qiniyye, Buq’ata, and Mas’ade in Golan, according to the report.

The protesters said the project aimed to steal more of the Syrian citizens’ property.

The Zionist regime seized the Golan Heights from Syria after the 1967 Six-Day War and later occupied it in a move that has never been recognized by the international community.

Syria’s Ambassador to the United Nations said on Tuesday the occupied Golan Heights will always remain an integral part of Syria and the Zionist regime’s occupation of the heights is a violation of international laws.

“The occupied Golan is part and parcel of Syria and regaining it, until the line of June 4th, 1967, with all means guaranteed by the international law, is a priority to us,” Bashar al-Bashar al-Jaafari said addressing a UN Security Council session.

Washington proclamation on occupied al-Quds and the occupied Syrian Golan

was a unilateral act and issued by a party that has no political, nor legal capacity to dispose of parts of the Syrian Arab Republic and occupied Palestine, he added. “Syria calls on UNSC to force the Israeli occupation to stop its practices in the Syrian Golan and looting its resources including oil,” al-Jaafari stressed, SANA reported.

He said that the regime’s measures in occupied Palestine and occupied Syrian Golan gravely violate the international law.

On March 25 last year, U.S. President Donald Trump signed a decree that suited the regime’s interest regarding the Golan Heights. The signing took place at the start of a meeting with Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington.

The regime has built dozens of settlements in the area ever since and has used the region to carry out a number of military operations in Syria.

The Israeli regime has long been pushing for the U.S. recognition of Israeli “sovereignty” over the territory. In March 2019, US President Donald Trump offered that recognition. Trump’s move came over a year after he recognized al-Quds as the “capital” of the Zionist regime and moved the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to the occupied Palestinian city.

The United Nations has time and again stressed Syria’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights.

Back in December 2018, the majority of the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution urging the Israeli regime to withdraw from Golan.

Ahead of Holocaust Anniversary Saudi Cleric Visits Auschwitz Camp

RIYADH (Dispatches) – A senior Saudi religious scholar and former justice minister has visited the former Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz in Poland along with a Jewish group, days before the Zionist regime is going to commemorate the Holocaust in the occupied al-Quds.

Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Karim bin Abdulaziz al-Issa, the secretary general of the Mecca-based Muslim World League (MWL), led a delegation of 62 Muslims, including 25 prominent religious scholars, from some 28 countries during the visit. A delegation of American Jewish Committee (AJC) officials was in the company as well.

The CEO of the AJC, David Harris, described Issa’s visit to Auschwitz as highly significant, claiming that the trip represented “the most senior delegation” of

Muslim scholars to visit Auschwitz ever.

The visit came less than two years after Issa, who is considered to be a close associate of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, visited the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, in May 2018.

In May 2019, AJC and MWL signed a memorandum of understanding, agreeing to take part in a trip to Auschwitz together this year.

Issa has also accepted an invitation from Harris to address the AJC Global Forum in Berlin in June 2020. Harris, in turn, will lead an AJC delegation to Saudi Arabia.

The senior Saudi cleric’s visit to Auschwitz comes as Saudi Arabia is trying to bring out in the open its years-long clandestine relations with the Zionist regime.

Back on July 22, 2019, angry Palestinians jeered and cursed a Saudi blogger known to be a huge fan of establishing formal ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

One video clip posted on Twitter at the time showed Mohammed Saud being cursed and jeered as he was visiting the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the Old City of al-Quds.

He was part of a six-person media delegation from the Arab world, including representatives from Jordan, who were in the occupied Palestinian territories at the invitation of the Zionist regime’s foreign ministry.

Palestinians protesting his visit called him a “traitor”, “animal” and “Zionist trash”, and also told him to “go to a synagogue” instead of praying at a mosque.

Another video clip showed

plastic chairs and sticks being thrown at him as he walked in the market in the Old City.

Last may, Lebanese daily Arabic-language newspaper al-Akhabar said the Saudi crown prince had offered Palestinian Authority chief Mahmoud Abbas 10 billion dollars in return for accepting US President Donald Trump’s controversial proposal for peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, dubbed “the deal of the century.”

Akhabar noted that Abbas had turned down the offer, saying supporting the deal would be “the end of his political life.”

Earlier last year, delegates from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt at a meeting of Arab states reportedly opposed bids condemning the normalization of relations with the occupying regime.

Lebanese President:

Central Bank, Finance Ministry Responsible for Financial Deterioration

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanese President Michel Aoun has blamed the Central Bank and the finance ministry for the financial deterioration in the country, Asharq al-Awsat newspaper has reported. “The Central Bank is responsible for the monetary policy while the finance ministry failed to adopt proper budgets,” Aoun said.

Aoun said the finance ministry did not pay the money allocated for the electricity strategy according to the laws issued by parliament.

Aoun assured that he will not allow any obstacles coming in the way of reforms.

He assured that the current government will definitely succeed and Lebanon will overcome the challenges if the crisis is probably managed

by the new officials.

After protests that gripped the country, Lebanon’s Prime Minister Hassan Diab announced the formation of a new cabinet of 20 ministers on Tuesday.

The United Nations says violence caused by “strange groups” in Beirut seems to be politically driven in an attempt to undermine security and stability in Lebanon, which has faced anti-government protest rallies for the past three months.

UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jan Kubis made the remarks on his official Twitter account on Thursday, referring to attacks on security forces and vandalism of state institutions and private property in Beirut during the past few days.

“Nights of violence and vandalism by strange groups targeting state institutions and private properties, waves of attacks on security forces by stones, flares and Molotov cocktails?” the senior UN official asked.

“This looks more like a political manipulation to provoke the security forces, to undermine civil peace, to fan up sectarian strife,” Kubis added, without elaborating further.

His comments come as the unrest in Beirut has deepened the multi-faceted crisis sweeping the Mediterranean country which grapples with financial strains that have sunk the currency, increased prices and driven banks to impose capital controls.

Palestinian, Russian Presidents Meet

BETHLEHEM (Dispatches) – Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has met with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in the southern West Bank city of Bethlehem, briefing him on the ongoing Zionist-Palestinian situation.

The two leaders discussed the “Deal of the Century” proposed by the United States, the Zionist regime’s current confiscation of Palestinian land, and Palestine’s efforts to hold its legislative and presidential elections, according to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa.

Abbas welcomed Putin’s visit to Palestine, describing the Russian president as his “personal friend and the friend of the Palestinian people.”

“I welcome my dear friend, President Vladimir Putin ... who never misses an opportunity to talk about or support the Palestinian cause, and this is what we are accustomed to,” said Abbas. For his part, the Russian presi-

dent praised the historical relations between the two sides, expressing his readiness to cooperate with and support Palestine in all fields.

This is Putin’s third visit to Palestine. His first visit was in 2005 and the second was in 2012.

The previous day, hosting the French leader, Mahmoud Abbas renewed a call for Europe to recognize the State of Palestine with Israeli-occupied East al-Quds as its capital.

Abbas met with President Emmanuel Macron of France in the West Bank city of Ramallah, where the pair discussed the latest developments in the so-called peace process and regional affairs.

Abbas highlighted France’s role in “saving the political process from the stalemate caused by Israel’s intransigence.”

He expressed hope that Paris would recognize a Palestinian state on the pre-1967 lines with East al-Quds as its “capital”.