

Report: Saudi Crown Prince Kidnapped Princess Cousin

RIYADH (Press TV) – A report says Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has kidnapped his cousin, Princess Basmah bint Saud bin Abdulaziz, who has been missing for over a year, amid a crackdown on critical voices.

According to Spanish ABC newspaper, the princess, a critic of the royal family and an advocate for women's rights, has been held in al-Hayer Prison since she was abducted in February last year.

The paper released footage purportedly recorded by a surveillance system showing a group of eight men waiting for the princess outside an elevator in her palace in Jeddah on February 28, 2019. Some members of the group are then seen noticing the cameras and attempting to disable or cover them.

"Since then, she has been held in cell 108 of Wing B where she is allowed to contact her family once a week," the daily quoted a source close to the princess as saying, adding that her family did not know when she would be freed.

The source said the princess was kidnapped "on suspicion of trying to flee the country" with her daughter. She had been due to travel to Switzerland for medical treatment.

Late last year, Germany's Deutsche Welle reported that Princess Basmah had been banned from leaving the country on December 18, 2018 "accompanied by her daughter, for urgent medical attention as requested by her Swiss doctor." The princess' plane was "kept on the ground and she was not allowed to leave" despite having clearances to fly out of Jeddah, DW added, citing documents it had seen.

Princess Basmah returned to Saudi Arabia in



Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

2016 after the then-Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef intervened with the king to secure her return.

The princess was demanding that King Salman return vast pieces of land owned by her father, the late King Saud bin Abdulaziz, in the city of Taif, and two billion dollars held in Swiss bank accounts.

ABC quoted a source close to bin Nayef as saying that the princess might remain in the maximum-security prison until she gave up the claim for her father's property.

Meanwhile, sources close to Princess Basmah suspect that her detention is part of a crackdown led by Mohammed bin Salman against his critics among the royal family.

A number of high-ranking Saudi royals and other individuals have been arrested recently, prompting speculation that the Saudi crown prince may be seeking to further tighten his grip on power ahead of a probable ascension in the near future.

Back in 2017, bin Salman ousted bin Nayef in a secretive push to become crown prince. That same year, dozens of high-ranking Saudi officials and figures were also detained on bin Salman's order and placed in the luxury Ritz-Carlton hotel under tight security over corruption charges.

The detentions came in a crackdown widely believed to be aimed at consolidating Mohammed's power. That purge followed an earlier roundup of Muslim clerics, writers, economists, and public figures.

Wishing... (Continued From Page One)

In a statement, Russia's foreign ministry said that the U.S. sanctions create a strong barrier for Iran that has been hit heavily by the virus.

"Illegal unilateral U.S. sanctions, imposed since May 2018 as part of the 'maximum pressure' campaign, are a powerful obstacle to effective fight against the infection," it said.

"The reason for the many victims, caused by it, lies not only in the disease itself, but also in the fact that the U.S., purposefully hinder the resistance" to the coronavirus, the statement added.

"Millions of Iranian citizens were cut off from the possibility of purchasing necessary medical supplies, no matter how hard Washington tried to distort it. The anti-human policy of the U.S. provokes deep regret, alarm and serious concern," it went on to say.

Shutdowns... (Continued From Page One)

many thrown out of work until further notice as the list of businesses forced to close across the U.S. extended to restaurants, bars, gyms and casinos.

Comparing crowded U.S. jails to "ticking time bombs," defense lawyers are urging law enforcement officials to release more defendants on bail while they await trial amid the coronavirus pandemic - an approach that has already been adopted by San Francisco and Philadelphia.

The Federal Defenders of New York, which represents defendants who cannot afford a lawyer, wrote in a letter that prosecutors should not engage in "business as usual" when deciding whether to recommend jail for defendants awaiting trial.

"Absent extraordinary circumstances, namely cases that involve an imminent threat of violence, it does not advance public safety to add more people to our local jails," the organization's director, David Patton, wrote in the letter to federal judges and prosecutors in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

"I truly believe the jails are ticking time bombs," Patton said.

Law enforcement officials debate how to limit the spread of the coronavirus among the millions of people in jails, prisons, immigrant detention centers, and other facilities around the country.

Sales of guns and ammunition are soaring across the U.S. as fears of possible social unrest amid the coronavirus crisis are prompting some Americans to turn to firearms as a form of self-protection.

On the west coast, long lines of customers were queuing up outside gun stores to stock up on deadly materials. At the Martin B Retting gun shop in Culver City, California, the queues stretched round the block throughout the weekend.

One customer told the LA Times: "Politicians and anti-gun people have been telling us for the longest time that we don't need guns. But right now, a lot of people are truly scared, and they can make that decision themselves."

Larry Hyatt, owner of one of the country's largest gun shops, Hyatt Guns in Charlotte, North Carolina, told the Guardian that the scenes of mass buying at his store were virtually unprecedented. "This is only the second time in my 61 years of business that we've seen anything like this," he said, adding that the first occasion was the aftermath of the mass shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school in Connecticut in 2012.

"We are experiencing a massive rush to buy guns and ammunition as people feel the need to protect themselves and their families," Hyatt said that the type of guns being bought was reflective of the fear prevalent among customers. There was almost no interest in hunting rifles. Instead, people were opting for target guns and there was big demand for AR-15 semi-automatic assault-style rifles. Asked why he thought the spike was happening, Hyatt replied: "Financial meltdown, pandemic, crime, politics ... you throw it all into the pot, and you have one hell of a mess."

A major online dealer of ammunition, Ammo.com, has put out figures for sales from 23 February to 4 March that give an indication of the scale of the surge. In that 11-day period sales increased 68% compared to the 11 days up to 23 February.

Sales were especially pronounced in North Carolina and Georgia, which

experienced a leap of 179% and 169% respectively. Other states with large increases included Pennsylvania, Texas, Florida, Illinois and New York.

In a statement, Ammo.com's marketing manager, Alex Horsman, said: "We know certain things impact ammo sales, mostly political events or economic instability when people feel their rights may end up infringed. This is our first experience with a virus leading to such a boost in sales."

Apart from general anxiety surrounding coronavirus, some gun sale spikes appeared to have specific causes. The Trace reported that in Washington state and California, locations of early out breaks of the virus, gun sales increased acutely propelled by Asian American fearful that they could face xenophobic and racist violence against their families given that the original source of coronavirus was China.

"People are panicking because they don't feel secure. They worry about a riot or maybe that people will start to target the Chinese," David Liu, a Chinese-American gun dealer outside Los Angeles, told the Trace.

Firearms are already the second most prevalent killer of children in the US after car crashes. In the 14- to 17-year-old bracket, gun injuries are the highest single cause of death, according to research from the University of Michigan school of public health.

Calling the highly contagious virus an "invisible enemy," Trump said the worst of the outbreak could be over by July, August or later and warned a recession was possible.

Zurfi...

(Continued From Page One)

on holding "early fair elections" and to meet protests' demands.

Hours before the nomination, two rockets fell inside Basmaya military camp to the south of Baghdad, which houses U.S. troops, without causing any damage or injuries.

The attack came a day after U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo warned Iraq's prime minister that the United States would take respond with force if attacked.

Pompeo spoke to Abdul Mahdi on Sunday, a day after three American troops and several Iraqi forces were wounded in the second major rocket attack in the past week on an Iraqi base north of Baghdad, U.S. and Iraqi officials said, raising the stakes in an escalating cycle of attacks.

He said Iraq's government should defend U.S. troops, according to the statement from State Department spokeswoman Morgan Ortigas.

Pompeo's threat came after the Iraqi government summoned U.S. and British ambassadors to Baghdad on Friday over a string of American airstrikes which killed six members of the Iraqi army police and a civilian.

Iraq said on Tuesday it has lodged a formal complaint with the UN Security Council over the U.S. airstrikes.

Iraq's Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmed al-Sahaf said the ministry sent two protest letters to the council over the attacks, which targeted positions of the Iraqi army, police and Hashd al-Sha'abi on Thursday night.

He described the airstrikes as a "hostile act and a clear violation of the terms of US military presence" in Iraq.

The attacks killed three Iraqi soldiers, two police officers and a civilian worker, and damaged an unfinished civilian airport.

On Saturday, a second similar rocket attack on Taji wounded three U.S. troops. A new group calling itself As-saba al-Thaerin claimed responsibility for the attack.

Anti-American sentiment has been running high in Iraq following the U.S. assassination of Iran's General Qassem Soleimani and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and their companions on January 3.

UNICEF...

(Continued From Page 2)

Kuwait's top diplomat said his country would give a donation of \$10 million to Iran to help the efforts to contain the coronavirus epidemic.

In a telephone conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Tuesday morning, For his part, Zarif expressed gratitude to the Kuwaiti government and nation, and described the war on the virus as a global issue that requires regional and international cooperation.

Businessman Arrested Over Alleged Gulen Links

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) – Azeri Turkish businessman Mubariz Mansimov Gurbanoglu has been arrested in one of the highest-profile detentions of a crackdown against suspects linked to a network accused of carrying out an attempted coup in 2016, Istanbul police say.

Gurbanoglu is the founder and chairman of the Istanbul-based Palmali group, which operates a fleet of freight vessels.

After he was detained at the weekend, a court ordered his formal arrest over ties to the network of U.S.-based cleric

Fethullah Gulen which President Tayyip Erdogan blames for the failed putsch in which about 250 people died, police and state-owned Anadolu news agency said.

Gurbanoglu's home and company were searched.

Nobody from Palmali was available to comment.

The Istanbul court ordered that he be kept in custody on a charge of belonging to a terrorist group, Anadolu said.

He was listed by Forbes as worth \$1.3 billion in 2015, with interests in dairy products, me-

dia, resorts and planes, as well as having a fleet of oil tankers. Born in the Azeri capital Baku, he became a Turkish citizen in 2006, taking the name Gurbanoglu.

Gulen, who has lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999, has denied any involvement in the attempted coup. He was once an ally of Erdogan but became his arch foe.

Gulen's supporters have for years been accused by Ankara of establishing a "parallel state" by infiltrating the police, judiciary and other state institu-

tions.

About 80,000 people have been jailed pending trial and some 150,000 civil servants, military personnel and others sacked or suspended from their jobs since the coup attempt.

Prosecutors last month ordered the arrest of another nearly 700 people, including military and justice ministry personnel.

The European Union and rights groups have criticized the scale of the crackdown, while Ankara has defended the measures as a necessary response to the security threat.

Egypt's total confirmed virus cases stands at 166 after the ministry reported 40 new cases, 35 of them Egyptians and five foreigners of various nationalities.

Jordan to Close All Commercial Centers

Jordan has decided to close all malls and commercial centers to curb the spread of COVID-19, Minister of State for Media Affairs Amjad Adaileh said at a press conference in Amman on Tuesday.

All private sector companies will be closed except for hospitals, pharmacies and food stores, the minister said.

Gatherings of more than 10 people will be banned and travelling between cities and governorates will be prohibited, he added.

Jordan also decided to stop the printing of newspapers and suspend public transportation.

The country will prepare quarantine camps at land border crossings for all passengers arriving at the country, Adaileh said, adding that all measures will go into effect by March 18 and will last for two weeks.

U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Syrian Defense Minister

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – The United States has added Syrian Defense Minister Ali Abdullah Ayoub to its Specially Designated Nationals And Blocked Persons List, according to the official website of the U.S. Treasury.

Last year, the U.S. Treasury sanctioned 16 individuals and entities associated with President Assad's administration. The restrictions prohibited material support to the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad, including shipments of oil to Syrian

government-controlled ports.

Syria has repeatedly condemned U.S. and EU sanctions, noting that the damage caused by them was more palpable than that caused by foreign-backed terrorists.

The sanctions against the minister also come amid tensions in the country's north-west that became a conflict zone between Syrian forces and the Turkish military.

The Syrian Arab Army conducted a strike against Tahrir al-Sham terrorists in Idlib, killing up to 36 Turkish soldiers, deployed

next to the terrorists. In retaliation, Turkey attacked the Syrian military, claiming that its strikes "neutralized" around 300 Syrian servicemen and destroyed multiple military vehicles.

A major escalation was avoided thanks to an agreement negotiated by Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan on establishing a security corridor that runs six kilometers (3.7 miles) north and south of the M4 highway that connects Latakia to Saraqib.