

ISTANBUL (Reuters) – The European Union should spend more than the 6 billion euros (\$6.6 billion) already allotted to fund Syrian refugees in Turkey, and speed up the flow of that money, the Turkish foreign ministry's EU point person says. EU funds support the roughly 3.5 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, after Syria's more than eight year war killed hundreds of thousands and pushed millions from their homes. In turn, Turkey has agreed to halt further immigration to Europe. "The flow of funds should be sped up and the amount of funding should be increased," said Faruk Kaymakci, a deputy Turkish minister of foreign affairs.

Time wears out bodies, renews hopes, brings death nearer and takes away aspirations. Whoever gets anything from the world lives in anxiety for holding it and whoever loses anything passes his days grieving over the loss.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Hezbollah Wants All Sides in Lebanon Government



Secretary General of the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah delivers a speech broadcast from the Lebanese capital city of Beirut on December 13, 2019.

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon's Hezbollah says the next government must bring together all sides so that it can tackle the country's worst economic crisis in decades. "How can a government of one color tackle a crisis this dangerous?" Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said in a

televised speech. "The crisis requires that everyone stand together."

The leader of the Shia resistance movement said Hezbollah insists on its ally the FPM - Lebanon's largest Christian political bloc - taking part in the new cabinet. He added that he hoped a new prime

minister would be named on Monday, but said that even so, forming the government would not be easy.

Lebanon urgently needs a new administration to pull it out of the crisis. Foreign donors will only give support after the country gets a cabinet that can enact re-

forms.

Talks between Lebanon's main parties have been deadlocked since Saad al-Hariri resigned as prime minister in late October amid protests.

The secretary general of Lebanon's resistance movement also said that Hezbollah poses a considerable threat to the scenarios developed by the United States and the Zionist regime to be implemented in the Middle East.

"The U.S. is doing its utmost to depict Hezbollah as a threat to Lebanon. Americans are actually vying for their own interests and those of Israel. The interests of the Lebanese nation are not a matter of concern to them at all. The U.S. is paying out millions of dollars as part of its attempts to sully the image of Hezbollah, yet such bids are all doomed to failure," Nasrallah said.

He added that Washington is lying and disseminating fake news about the recent wave of anti-government protests in Lebanon, noting that U.S. statesmen are exercising such a practice as they are beset with their own problems and desperately trying to get to grips with them.

The leader of the Lebanese resistance movement further noted that the U.S. is unable to sideline Hezbollah and push it away from Lebanon's political arena, describing Washington's approach vis-à-vis the Arab country's domestic issues as "silly and improper."

Iraqis Protest U.S. Sanctions on Hashd al-Sha'abi Leaders



Supporters of Hashd al-Sha'abi march through Baghdad on Saturday, trampling on giant U.S. flags after Washington slapped sanctions on their leader.

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Several thousand supporters of one of the most powerful popular resistance groups in Iraq marched through Baghdad on Saturday, trampling on giant U.S. flags after Washington slapped sanctions on their leader.

Last week Washington imposed sanctions on three Iraqis including Qais al-Khazali -- who heads Asaib Ahl al-Haq, part of the Hashed al-Sha'abi popular security force tied to the Iraqi state -- and his brother. His supporters blocked major roads in the capital on Saturday, staging mock hangings using effigies of U.S. President Donald Trump, Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Mohammed bin Salman, crown prince of Saudi Arabia.

"We denounce the unjust decision" to punish Khazali, said Mahmoud al-Rubaye, a member of Asaib Ahl al-Haq's political wing. In a statement earlier this month, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced sanctions on Qais al-Khazali and his brother Laith, two leaders of the Asaib Ahl al-Haq group, as well as Hussein Falil Aziz al-Lami of Kata'ib Hezbollah.

The sanctions restrict the individuals' travel to the U.S. and freeze any American-held assets by the

trio. "The Iraqi people want their country back," Pompeo said. "They are calling for genuine reform and accountability and for trustworthy leaders who will put Iraq's national interests first."

Separately, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Schenker warned that the Iraqi officials, who deal with the blacklisted Hashd al-Sha'abi leaders, would face their own economic sanctions.

He further raised the possibility of imposing sanctions on some of the Iraqi government security forces over what he called crackdown on protesters.

An Iraqi source told CNN that the practical impact of the punitive measures is "negligible" as the designated Iraqis are not thought to have any assets in the U.S.

Schenker also acknowledged that the designations are "first and foremost" symbolic, adding, however, that more designations will be coming.

"We are not done. This is an ongoing process," he said.

Hashd al-Sha'abi, a combination of some 40 groups of mostly Shia fighters as well as Sunnis and Christians, was formed shortly after the Daesh terrorist group emerged in Iraq in 2014.

UN Renews Agency Helping Palestinian Refugees

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) – The United Nations General Assembly has overwhelmingly renewed the mandate for a UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees for another three years amid a cash shortfall triggered by a halt in U.S. funding.

The mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) was extended until June 30, 2023, with 169 votes in favor and nine abstentions, while the United States and the Zionist regime voted against.

UNRWA, which is established in 1949, provides education,

health and relief services as well as housing and microfinance assistance to more than 5 million registered refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East al-Quds, as well as in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

The agency has faced budgetary difficulties since last year, when the United States halted its aid of \$360 million per year.

In a statement published by the official Palestinian news agency Wafa, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas praised the vote as a victory for international law and the

rights of the Palestinian refugees.

The Hamas resistance movement, which is based in the Gaza Strip, hailed the UN vote as a defeat for the United States and a failure of its attempts to pressure UN member-states against UNRWA.

"We welcome the decision to renew the international mandate to UNRWA and we see it as another failure to hostile U.S. policies to the Palestinian rights," Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri told Reuters.

The U.S. mission to the United

Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the vote.

Hanan Ashrawi, a senior Palestine Liberation Organization official, praised the UN vote on Friday and said it was the United Nations' responsibility to combat what she called U.S. and Zionist attacks on Palestinian refugees.

"All attempts at trying to limit UNRWA's mandate or defund it or attack it have failed, and we hope that the international community will continue to come to the rescue," she said.

'Three White Helmets Killed While Transporting Explosives'

DAMASCUS (Press TV) – At least three members of the so-called civil defense group White Helmets have been killed while transporting a shipment of explosives inside an ambulance in Syria's west-central province of Hama, amid reports that they are preparing to carry out terrorist and chemical attacks across the country in a bid to incriminate Syrian government forces and invent pretexts for possible acts of aggression on army troops.

Local sources told the Arabic service of Russia's Sputnik news agency that the members of the notorious White Helmets were killed when the explosives denoted inside the vehicle as they were traveling along a road on the outskirts of Qastun village in the northwestern sector of the province on Saturday afternoon.

The sources added that members of the Western-backed "aid" group were apparently transporting explosive materials from an area in the neighboring Idlib province to a location in the northwestern part of Hama.

The development took place only two days after the head of the Russian Center for the Rec-

onciliation of Opposing Sides in Syria, Yuri Borenkov, said members of the Takfiri Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) terrorist outfit together with the White Helmets group are gearing up for a false-flag chemical attack in the southern part of Idlib de-escalation zone.

"The Center has also received information that HTS leaders, in coordination with members of the so-called White Helmets humanitarian organization, plan to use toxic materials and destroy civilian infrastructure in the southern part of Idlib de-escalation zone," Borenkov said on Thursday.

He added, "The aim of the provocation is to prepare (fabricated) photos and video materials, and then disseminate them via internet, Arab and Western media outlets to accuse Syrian government forces of using chemical weapons against civilians and of conducting indiscriminate strikes."

Western governments and their allies have never stopped pointing the finger at Damascus whenever an apparent chemical attack takes place.

Back on April 14, 2018, the United States, Britain and France carried out a string of airstrikes against Syria over a suspected chemical weapons attack on the city of Douma, located about 10 kilometers northeast of the capital Damascus.

Washington and its allies blamed Damascus for the Douma attack, an allegation rejected by the Syrian government.

Damascus says the foreign-backed militants with the Western-support White Helmets staged the chemical attack in an attempt to frame the Syrian government.

The United States has warned it would respond to any possible chemical weapons attack by Syrian government forces with retaliatory strikes, stressing that the attacks would be stronger than those conducted by American, British and French forces last year.

This is while Syria surrendered its stockpile of chemical weapons in 2014 to a joint mission led by the United States and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which oversaw the destruction of the weaponry.

Qatar: Progress in Resolving Persian Gulf Dispute Small

DOHA (Dispatches) – Qatar's foreign minister says there has been small progress to resolve a 2-1/2 year dispute between the Persian Gulf state and its neighbors.

Asked whether there was progress at the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit held last week, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani told Reuters that there has been "small progress, just a little progress".

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut diplomatic and trade links with Qatar in June 2017, accusing it of backing terrorism. Qatar denies the charge and accuses its neighbors of seeking to curtail its sovereignty.

The quartet urged the Qatari government to comply with a list of demands that included severing ties with Iran and closing a Turkish military base in Qatar or face sanctions. Doha flatly

rejected the demands and said it was being targeted because of the independent policies that it pursued.

Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani turned down an invitation by Saudi Arabia to attend the 40th GCC summit in Riyadh this month, naming Prime Minister Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa Al Thani to lead the Qatari delegation to the annual meeting.

Despite earlier speculation about a possible thaw in Saudi relations with Qatar in the course of the talks, the summit came to an end with no progress made in their standoff.

Earlier this month, Qatar said attempts to diffuse tensions between the two countries had "moved from stalemate to progress."

It seems that Riyadh changed its tone as a result of its failure both in the economic boycott of Qatar and in the military campaign against Yemen.