

KUWAIT CITY (Dispatches) – Kuwait has banned until further notice commercial flights to 31 countries it says that it regards as high risk due to the spread of the coronavirus, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation said on Saturday. The countries include India, Pakistan, Egypt, the Philippines, Lebanon and Sri Lanka, which all have large numbers of expatriates in Kuwait. The list also includes China, Brazil, Mexico, Italy and Iraq. The ban was announced the same day Kuwait began a partial resumption of commercial flights. The authorities have said Kuwait International Airport would run at about 30% capacity from Saturday, gradually increasing in coming months.

A greedy man will always find himself in the shackles of humility.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

U.S. Only Concerned About Looting Iraqi Oil: PMU

Lebanon Prepared to Defend Against Zionist Attacks: President



Supporters of Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'abi forces hold placards depicting trampled U.S. symbols reading in Arabic "Welcome" during a protest outside the U.S. embassy in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on January 1, 2020 to condemn the U.S. airstrikes that killed 25 Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters.



In this file picture, Hezbollah fighters parade during a ceremony in a southern suburb of Beirut, Lebanon.

BAGHDAD (Press TV) – An official from Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces or Hashd al-Sha'abi says Washington only seeks to loot the Arab country's crude oil, stressing that U.S. officials are unconcerned about the Iraqi nation and their woes.

"The United States simply intends to exploit the needs of our people to achieve its own goals," Iraq's al-Ahad television network quoted Qais al-Khazali, leader of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, which is part of the PMU, as saying in a televised speech on the occasion of Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice).

He stressed that U.S. President Donald Trump is only think-

ing about how to take control of Iraqi oil fields and how to secure agreements in the field of electricity with the Iraqi government.

Khazali then called upon the incumbent Baghdad government to quickly implement the framework agreement that the previous administration signed last year with German industrial conglomerate Siemens to upgrade the electricity grid of the power-strapped country.

The Trump administration is pushing for a deal between Washington, Baghdad and six Persian Gulf states to connect Iraq's nationwide power grid to that of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Coun-

cil (GCC).

"Can the government not succumb to U.S. pressure?" al-Khazali asked, underlining that the completion of the agreement is "a sovereign decision."

Iraq relies on Iran for trade and natural gas that generates as much as 45% of its electricity. Iran transmits another 1,200 megawatts directly, making itself an indispensable energy source for its Arab neighbor, but the United States is trying to pry Baghdad away from Tehran's orbit.

The U.S. has been enlisting its companies and allies such as Saudi Arabia to replace Iran as Iraq's source of energy.

Khazali warned against attempts by certain foreign media outlets to take advantage of renewed overnight anti-government protests.

Back on May 25, Khazali strongly denounced U.S. military presence in Iraq, saying such a deployment is meant to safeguard the security and interests of the Zionist regime.

"There is a national and courageous will, which rejects the presence of any foreign troops on Iraqi soil. There have been talks of U.S. intentions to withdraw from Iraq, but we doubt them," he said at the time.

The senior Hashd al-Sha'abi leader added, "The U.S. [military] presence in Iraq is meant to protect the security and interests of the Israeli regime. Neither are we warlords nor thirsty for blood, but rather patriots looking for the dignity and sovereignty of the Iraqi nation."

Anti-U.S. sentiment has been running high in Iraq following the assassination of top Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy head of the PMU, and their companions in a U.S. assassination drone airstrike authorized by President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3.

Iraqi lawmakers approved a bill two days after the attack, demanding the withdrawal of all foreign military forces led by the United States from the country.

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon is prepared to defend itself against the Zionist regime's attacks, which are in violation of the 2006 UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution, Lebanese President Michel Aoun said on Saturday.

In a televised address, the president said the occupying regime's attacks in southern Lebanon had once again flouted UNSC Resolution 1701, which calls for full cessation of hostilities and the regime's withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

Aoun asserted that Lebanon remains willing to abide by the resolution and resolving all disputes under UN supervision.

"We are committed to defending ourselves, our land, our water, and our authority. We will not compromise on this matter," he said.

The president's comments come after Zionist troops bombed the border town of Kafr Shuba on July 27 because of a "security incident." On the same day, Lebanon said it would lodge an official complaint with the UNSC.

The Zionist regime military claimed it had "thwarted an infiltration attempt by Hezbollah" in the Jabal Ros area.

Hezbollah resistance movement, however, denied the claim, saying: "There was no clash or shooting on our part in the events that took place today on the southern border in Lebanon, but rather it was only one party which was the fearful,

anxious, and tense enemy."

It also vowed to respond to the martyrdom of one of its members in "Israeli aggression" in Syria's capital Damascus last week.

The Russian ambassador to Beirut says U.S. officials are under the illusion that they can disarm the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement through sanctions.

"Disarming Hezbollah is the primary purpose of U.S. sanctions... I do not think that such a goal would be achieved through this method. The United States will not manage to force Hezbollah into laying down its weapons. This is an illusion," Zasyarkin said in an exclusive interview with Beirut-based Arabic-language al-Mayadeen television news network on Friday.

In late October 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump's administration imposed a new round of sanctions on Hezbollah, targeting individuals and international organizations that do business with the group.

"Over the past year, we have levied the highest sanctions ever imposed on Hezbollah, in a single year, by far. Just a few moments ago, I signed legislation imposing even more hard-hitting sanctions on Hezbollah to further starve them of their funds. And they are starving for them," Trump said during an event in Washington, DC, that marked the 35th anniversary of an attack on U.S. marine barracks in the Lebanese capital of Beirut.

UAE Launches Start-Up Operations at First Nuclear Plant

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) – The oil-rich United Arab Emirates on Saturday announced the startup of its Barakah nuclear power plant, the first in the Arab world.

"UAE first nuclear reactor at the Barakah Nuclear Energy Plant has achieved first criticality and successfully started up," tweeted Hamad Alkaabi, the country's representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The UAE premier and ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, tweeted that work at Barakah had "succeeded in loading nuclear fuel

packages, carrying out comprehensive tests and successfully completing the operation".

The UAE started loading fuel rods into the reactor at Barakah in February, after regulators gave the green light for the first of the plant's four reactors, opening the way for commercial operations.

The plant on the Persian Gulf coast west of Abu Dhabi had been due to go online in late 2017 but faced a number of delays that officials attributed to safety and regulatory requirements.

The Nawah Energy Company said at the time that Unit

1 would begin commercial operations after a "series of tests" leading to the start-up process.

During the process, the unit would be synchronized with the power grid and the first electricity produced.

When completed Barakah will have four reactors with 5,600 megawatts (MW) capacity. The UAE has not disclosed the total planned investment in the project.

The UAE has substantial oil and gas reserves, but it has made huge investments in developing clean alternatives, including solar energy.

The plant is a regional first --

Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, has said it plans to build up to 16 nuclear reactors, but the project has yet to materialize.

Barakah was built by a consortium led by the Korea Electric Power Corporation at a cost of some \$24.4 billion.

The Barakah plant, on the coast facing Iran across the Persian Gulf, stands just 50 kilometers (30 miles) from the Saudi border and closer to Qatar's capital Doha than to Abu Dhabi.

The UAE has said it will not be developing a uranium enrichment program or nuclear reprocessing technologies.

Full Lockdown Dominates West Bank During Eid

RAMALLAH/GAZA (Dispatches) – As part of the precautionary measures against coronavirus, Palestine imposed a full lockdown on the West Bank districts during the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha that started on Friday in Palestine.

The lockdown began upon an earlier government decision. The measures include banning transportation between towns and villages all over the West Bank.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Ministry of Health

said in a press statement that it recorded one death, 394 new COVID-19 infections, and 62 recovered cases in the West Bank.

"Since March 5, the ministry recorded 15,232 COVID-19 infections, including 85 deaths, 6,351 cases that recovered, and 8,796 cases still receiving medical care," said the statement.

The statement added that 14 cases are in critical conditions, including five linked to ventilators at intensive care units.

In Gaza, the Ministry of Health run by the Hamas resistance movement announced that it recorded two new COVID-19 cases on Thursday night, adding that the two infections are of citizens of Gaza who returned in recent days from abroad.

The ministry said in a press statement that since March 5, it recorded 78 infections, including 71 cases who had recovered in the Gaza Strip.

Flash Flooding in Afghanistan Kills 16, Including Children

KABUL (AP) – Flash flooding in eastern Afghanistan killed at least 16 people after heavy rains swept parts of a mountainous area, an Afghan official said Saturday.

Heavy floods hit the Khewa district, said Attaullah Khogyani, spokesman for the governor of Nangarhar province. He added that four others were wounded in the incident. The majority of the victims

are children, said Khogyani, He added that a team has been sent to the area to help with emergency services following the foul weather.

The flash floods damaged dozens of homes, the spokesman added.

Summer often brings heavy rainfall in eastern Afghanistan leading to floods that can leave hundreds of people dead and many more injured every year.