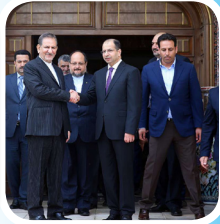


RAMALLAH (Dispatches) – Zionist troops on Friday martyred a Palestinian man during clashes in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. The ministry said the victim, identified as Muhammad al-Jabari, 24, was shot during clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian protesters in the southern West Bank city of al-Khalil (Hebron). He later succumbed to his injuries in hospital. The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said the man had disabilities.

BRATISLAVA (AFP) -- Tens of thousands of Slovaks Friday protested against the government and corruption, following the murder of journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée last month. The SME daily said about 40,000 people gathered in Bratislava, making it the biggest protest in the country since the 1989 Velvet Revolution that toppled Communism in former Czechoslovakia. Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kusnirova, both 27, were found shot dead at their home near Bratislava on Feb. 25.

Vice President Jahangiri in Baghdad:

Iran Reiterates Readiness to Rebuild Iraq



'Saad's Olive Tree' to Vie for Top Award at 16th Garden State Festival



Iranian Freestyle Wrestler Takes Over 1st Place in World Ranking



Truckloads of Aid Start Entering Syria's Eastern Ghouta



Trump Agrees to Face-to-Face Talks With Kim

SEOUL, South Korea (Dispatches)—After a year of threats and diatribes, U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un have agreed to meet face-to-face for talks about the North's nuclear program.

Trump said a meeting "is being planned" with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un just hours after speaking to South Korean national security chief Chung Eui-yong on Thursday.

It remains to be seen whether a summit, if it takes place, could lead to any meaningful breakthrough after an unusually provocative year. North Korea tested its most powerful nuclear weapon to date and test-launched three intercontinental ballistic missiles theoretically capable of striking the U.S. mainland.

Analysts say Trump's decision to accept Kim's invitation for a summit and to do it by May could be linked in part to a desire to claim a significant achievement in his most difficult foreign policy challenge before the U.S. midterm elections in November.

Both leaders have interests in striking a big deal, said Cheong Seong-Chang, a senior analyst at South Korea's Sejong Institute. Should it happen, the May summit between Trump and Kim will come shortly after a planned meeting between Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in in April. It's likely that North Korea will also push for summits with China, Russia and Japan later in the year to further break out of its isolation, Cheong said.

Trump will likely try to achieve something dramatic in his meeting with Kim, said Hong Min, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification, including a possible exchange of verbal commitments on the denuclearization of North Korea and a peace treaty between the two countries.

The United States and North Korea will likely be talking quite a bit in coming months and maybe even exchanging high-level delegations to set up the logistics of the summit. One of the biggest questions is where it will take place.

The United States would prefer Washington, while North Korea will want Trump to come to Pyongyang, its capital.

Unless the countries agree to a third-country location, which would likely be South Korea, experts see it as more likely that Trump will fly to Pyongyang.

Chung, who had paid a visit to Pyongyang earlier this week, said he had passed on a message to Trump that Kim was "committed to demilitarization" and had "pledged that North Korea will refrain from any further nuclear or

missile tests" if its security is guaranteed.

Speaking outside the White House on Thursday, he said Trump had expressed willingness to sit down with Kim "as soon as possible."

While no incumbent U.S. president has ever set foot in North Korea, Trump might be willing to become the first because it would fit the strong-willed, in-your-face type of leadership he tries to project, Hong said.

A big question will be whether Trump can accept a freeze of North Korea's nuclear weapons program rather than its elimination, said Koh Yu-hwan, a North Korea expert at Seoul's Dongguk University.

Kim will likely want to keep some nukes as a deterrent, but that might be hard for Trump to tolerate when he spent so much time harshly criticizing his predecessor, Barack Obama, for allegedly standing by and watching as North Korea became a nuclear threat.

Some experts speculate that North Korea might ask for a halt of annual military drills between the United States and South Korea or even the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula.

China, North Korea's main ally, said it welcomed the "positive signal" from both sides.

"We welcome this positive signal by the US and North Korea in having direct dialog," Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a regular press briefing on Friday. He said that "the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue is moving in the right direction."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also hailed the proposed meeting on Friday, saying, "We do hope that this meeting is going to take place."

"Certainly, it is required to normalize the situation around the Korean Peninsula," Lavrov was quoted by Russian state news agency Tass as saying on Friday.

South Korea's Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said Seoul is consulting with Washington on the planned summit between Trump and Kim.

Shortly after the announcement about the possible meeting, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also said he appreciated "North Korea's change."

Abe, however, attributed the diplomatic overture to the pressure of the sanctions on Pyongyang, saying, "We will continue imposing the utmost pressure until North Korea takes specific actions toward thorough, verifiable, and irreversible demilitarization."

"Japan and the U.S. have been and will be together 100%," Abe said.

Leader: No Talks With West Over Region



Ayatollah Khamenei addresses a group of people on the birth anniversary of Hazrat Fatema az-Zahra in Tehran, March 8, 2018.

TEHRAN (Dispatches) – Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on Thursday rejected U.S. and European efforts to negotiate over the country's military policies in the region.

"The seditionist U.S. administration which promotes corruption asks why we are present in the region. We are already in the region. Should we take permission from you?" the Leader said.

"We should have talks with the regional states over our presence in the region. Why should we talk to you?" Ayatollah Khamenei said. "If we ever decide to establish a

presence in the U.S., then yes we need to talk to you."

Ayatollah Khamenei also slammed similar European efforts. "It is no way related to you. Why are you here (in the region)? Here is our region."

"We, ourselves, hold talks with regional people and governments," the Leader added.

Ayatollah Khamenei's comments come three days after a visit by French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian to Tehran, where the top French diplomat sought talks on curbing Iran's ballistic missile program in a bid to convince the U.S.

to stay in the nuclear deal between world powers and Iran.

During his Monday visit, Le Drian told top Iranian officials, including President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Muhammad Javad Zarif, that there was "still a lot of work to do" on Iran's missile program.

Zarif countered that Europe needed to "play a more constructive role to preserve" the nuclear deal.

"And above all to put pressure on the United States to meet its commitments under the deal and not to allow it to present illogical and illegal demands," Zarif added.

U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened to pull Washington out of Iran's nuclear agreement with world powers, forged before he took office, unless three European signatories help "fix" the accord by forcing Tehran to limit its sway in the Middle East and rein in its ballistic missile program.

French President Emmanuel Macron has criticized the program and raised the possibility of new sanctions.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei said enemies have been constantly plotting against the Iranian nation during the past 40 years.

"The enemies of Iran have been deliberating in their think tanks since a few months ago, making plans for the last three months of the (Iranian) year, imagining that they can finish the Islamic Republic in Esfand (which ends March 21)."

Ayatollah Khamenei noted that despite the plots, the Iranian nation is always ready to deal with any aggressor.

The Leader also praised Islam for keeping women "modest" and in their "defined roles" such as educators and mothers.

"In contrast, there has always been a deviant framework; today, that different model for women is the one offered by the West," the Leader said.

"By promoting modest dress (hijab), Islam has blocked the path which would lead women to such a deviant lifestyle. Hijab is a means of immunity not restriction."

(Continued on Page 7)

In Blow to U.S. Demands: Iraq Incorporates Hashd Into Armed Forces

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) -- Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has issued a decree, ordering the formal inclusion of pro-government fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) in the Arab country's security forces.

According to the decree announced on Thursday, the volunteer forces, better known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, will be granted many of the same rights as members of the military.

The decree added that Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters will be given equivalent salaries to those members of the military under the Ministry of Defense's control.

They will also be subject to the laws of military service, and will gain access to military institutes and colleges.

The fighters have played a major role in the liberation of Daesh-held areas to the south, northeast and north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, ever since the terrorists launched an

offensive in the country in June 2014. Iraq has repeatedly condemned allegations of sectarian nature against Hashd al-Sha'abi.

In December 2016, Baghdad warned Riyadh of the ramifications of meddling in Iraq's internal affairs, after Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said Iraq cannot realize unity with the presence of the Popular Mobilization Units.

Saudi Arabia has repeatedly labeled the PMU, which incorporates volunteer forces from different Iraqi factions and tribes, as a Shia movement and called for the dismantling of the group.

The Iraqi parliament on November 26, 2016 approved a law giving full legal status to Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters. It recognized the PMU as part of the national armed forces, placed the volunteer fighters under the command of the prime minister, and granted them the right to receive salaries and pensions like the regular army and police forces.

British PM Misleads Britons on Saudi Invasion

LONDON (Middle East Eye) -- Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn has accused Theresa May of misleading parliament over the legal basis for Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, threatening to reignite a bitter political row over UK support for the conflict.

The fresh political row, which comes after the prime minister said the war in Yemen had United Nations backing, threatens to overshadow the last day of the visit to the UK by Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman.

It also came as the UK signed a preliminary deal with Saudi Arabia on Friday for the sale of 48 Typhoon fighter jets, to the dismay of rights campaigners.

In a full-throated defense of the UK's relationship with Riyadh on Wednesday, which came hours before she met with the powerful crown prince in Downing Street, May told parliament that Saudi-led

intervention is "backed" by the United Nations Security Council, and "as such" is supported by the UK.

Corbyn responded that UK forces were effectively "colluding" in war crimes by supporting Saudi forces.

Now, Corbyn has gone further and attacked May's comments in parliament, saying that she got her facts wrong, amid claims that the UN has not explicitly authorized the use of military force by the Saudi-led coalition under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the document which regulates when states are authorized to use "all military means" to enforce UN resolutions. Critics of the Saudi-led bombing campaign say the resolution did not authorize the use of force by the Saudi-led coalition. It merely noted a letter from the former president of Yemen, Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, calling for military intervention.

(Continued on Page 7)