

KABUL (Xinhua) – Afghanistan's lawmakers approved on Monday a 473-billion-afghani (about 6 billion U.S. dollar) national budget for 1400 fiscal year on the Persian calendar beginning Dec. 21, 2020, local media reported. "The Afghan parliament on Monday approved the current fiscal year's budget with majority of votes after weeks of tensions between the two state branches over the document," the Tolo news TV reported. The parliament rejected the budget draft twice over about 20 disputed points, according to the news report.

A conceited and self-admiring person is disliked by others; charity and alms are the best remedy for ailments and calamities; one has to account in the next world for the deeds that he has done in this world.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

U.S.-Backed Militants Steal 140,000 bpd of Syrian Oil: Report



A U.S. military vehicle patrols near the Rumaylan oil fields in Syria's militant-controlled northeastern Hasakah Province, on September 17, 2020.

DAMASCUS (Press TV) – Militants of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which is supported by the United States, steal 140,000 barrels of crude oil on a daily basis from oil fields in Syria's northeastern province of Hasakah, a report says.

Ghassan Halim Khalil, governor of Hasakah, announced the grim news in an interview with the Lebanese al-Akhar newspaper, adding that Syrian oil is being plundered by the

SDF militants in various ways, all with the participation and support of American forces deployed to the region.

He stressed that precise intelligence collected and received show that U.S.-backed militants use tanker trucks from Taramish area in the vicinity of Tigris and in al-Malikiyah to smuggle the Syrian oil to neighboring Iraq.

Khalil further noted that many tanker trucks pass through the

illegal al-Mahmoudiyah crossing into Iraq every day, adding that the SDF militants also regularly send mounts of stolen oil to their controlled areas in Syria.

The Syrian governor also revealed that the U.S. troops have ordered the SDF militants not to allow the Damascus-controlled areas receive oil.

Khalil added that while the Syrian people are suffering from the cold weather and hun-

ger, these U.S.-supported militants plunder Syria's national oil resources.

The U.S. looting of Syrian oil was first confirmed during a Senate hearing exchange between South Carolina Republican Senator Lindsey Graham and then U.S. secretary of state Mike Pompeo last July.

During his testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Pompeo confirmed for the first time that an American oil company would begin work in northeastern Syria, which is controlled by the SDF, which is an alliance of Kurdish militants operating against Damascus and currently controls areas in northern and eastern Syria.

The Syrian government at the time denounced in the strongest terms the agreement inked to plunder the country's natural resources, including Syrian oil and gas, under the sponsorship and support of the administration of former U.S. president Donald Trump.

Since late October 2019, the U.S. has been redeploying troops to the SDF-controlled oil fields in eastern Syria, in a reversal of Trump's earlier order to withdraw all troops from the war-torn country.

Daesh Terrorists Killed in Air Strikes in Iraq



In this photo taken on November 12, 2018 an Iraqi fighter of the Hashd al-Sha'abi secures the border in al-Qaim in Anbar province, opposite Albu Kamal in Syria's Dayr al-Zawr region.

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – At least seven Daesh terrorists were killed on Monday in air strikes on a hideout of the terrorist group in Iraq's northern province of Kirkuk, the Iraqi military said.

Based on intelligence reports, the aircraft conducted eight airstrikes on a Daesh position in a rugged area named Wadi al-Shay in the southern part of the province, the media office of the Joint Operations Command (JOC) said in a statement.

An Iraqi army force was sent to the scene and found bodies of seven terrorists, in addition to two explosive belts, ammunition, and weapons caches, the JOC statement said.

The security situation in Iraq has been improving since Iraqi security forces fully defeated the Daesh terrorists across the country late in 2017.

However, Daesh remnants have since melted in urban areas or deserts and rugged areas, carrying out frequent attacks against security forces and civilians.

Daesh remnants have been staging hit and run attacks across Iraq ever since the group's defeat.

The attacks have escalated over the past year, especially since the Iraqi parliament passed a law that mandated a full withdrawal of all foreign troops from the country.

Experts say the rise in terrorist activities is apparently aimed at creating a sense of insecurity in Iraq and

providing a pretext for the U.S. to keep its troops in the country.

Meanwhile, a report says swarms of helicopter gunships and drones are flying over al-Anbar as the U.S. is setting up its second military base in western Iraq near the Syrian border.

Iraq's al-Maloumah news agency cited an unnamed security source on Monday as saying that the unusual overflights above al-Qa'im District extended as far as the border with Syria.

According to the agency, the U.S. never notifies Iraqi security forces about its missions and Iraqi authorities are often kept in the dark about their nature and motivations behind them.

The new military base will be the second U.S. facility in al-Anbar after the sprawling Ain al-Assad Airbase.

The new outpost lies close to a hugely strategic area where the Iraqi, Syrian, and Jordanian borders meet.

The U.S. deployed troops to Iraq in 2014 under the pretext of fighting Daesh. Washington and its allies retain their forces in Iraq despite Baghdad having announced the defeat of the terrorist group in 2017.

U.S. troops are also based across the border in al-Tanf in Syria, where militants fighting the Syrian government are reportedly trained and armed and used for operations in Iraq and elsewhere.

Palestinian Vaccine Drive Faces Funding Shortfall: World Bank

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Palestinians' COVID-19 vaccination plan faces a \$30m-funding shortfall, even after factoring in support from a global vaccine scheme for poorer economies, the World Bank said in a report on Monday.

The Zionist regime should consider providing surplus doses to the Palestinians to help accelerate a vaccine roll-out in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, the bank said.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) plans to cover 20 percent of Palestinians through the COVAX vaccine-sharing program. PA officials hope to procure additional vaccines to achieve 60 percent coverage.

Cost estimates suggest that "a total of about \$55 million would be needed to cover 60 percent of the population, of which there is an existing gap of \$30 million," the World Bank said.

The Palestinians began

vaccinations this month and have received small donations from Russia and the United Arab Emirates.

But the roughly 32,000 doses received to date fall far short of the 5.2 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, territory the Zionist regime captured in a 1967 war.

Palestinians and rights groups have accused the Zionist regime of ignoring its duties as an occupying power by not including the Palestinians in its inoculation pro-

gram.

Occupying regime officials have said that under the Oslo accords, the PA health ministry is responsible for vaccinating people in Gaza and parts of the West Bank.

While the PA expects to receive an initial COVAX shipment within weeks, the program is at risk of failing, mainly due to a lack of funds. The PA says it has supply deals with Russia and drug-maker AstraZeneca but doses have been slow to arrive.

Syria Approves Russia's Sputnik V Vaccine: Envoy

MOSCOW (Sputnik) – Syria has approved Russia's Sputnik V and is ready to import the coronavirus vaccine, the Syrian Ambassador to Moscow, Riad Haddad, said to Sputnik Monday. "Damascus has taken all measures to register the Russian vaccine - Sputnik V - in Syria and approved its use," Haddad said to Sputnik.

According to Haddad, the vaccine will be in Syria soon, after Damascus announced its readiness to receive and use it.

The Russian vaccine, developed by the Gamaleya Epidemiology and Microbiology Center and registered by the Russian Ministry of Health on 11 August, was the world's first registered vaccine against the coronavirus. In February, peer-reviewed medical jour-

nal The Lancet published an interim analysis from Phase III clinical trial of the Russian vaccine, showing its 91.6-percent efficacy against symptomatic COVID-19. The vaccine has already been approved in 31 countries, including Belarus, Serbia, Hungary, San Marino, Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Algeria, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates, among others.

A day earlier, Russian Ambassador to Lebanon Alexander Rudakov said that Russia may explore the possibility of allowing Lebanon to produce the Sputnik V.

"We are ready to help Lebanon and its people in all fields, including the fight against COVID-19 ... there will be communication with the

relevant companies to discuss the possibility of manufacturing Russia's Sputnik V vaccine in Lebanon," Rudakov said.

The ambassador's remarks came during his visit on Saturday with Lebanese Caretaker Industry Minister Imad Hoballah to Arwan Pharmaceutical Industries, an advanced biotech manufacturing facility, in the town of Jadra in Mount Lebanon, to check the company's methods of manufacturing medicines.

Hoballah hoped that the visit would open the way to discussions to produce the Russian vaccine in Lebanon with help from Moscow.

Lebanon received on Saturday the second batch of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines and expects to receive more shipments.

Gaza Refugees Protest UNRWA's Downsized Food Coupons

GAZA STRIP (Dispatches) – Dozens of Palestinian refugees in the Gaza Strip staged a protest on Sunday against the recent decision by UNRWA to downsize food coupons, Anadolu has reported.

Organized by a popular committee affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the protest was held outside UNRWA's food distribution center at Al-Shati (Beach) Refugee Camp. It was attended by representatives of the national factions, associations and community institutions in the refugee camps.

The protesters expressed their rejection of UNRWA's decision to impose cuts on its services. They accused the agency of taking the first practical steps towards cutting its essential services for the refugees.

The popular committees demanded that UNRWA should cancel the new single coupon system and reintroduce the two coupon system, to redress the balance for Palestinian refugees classified as

being under the extreme poverty line. An estimated 770,000 refugees are already at that level.

UNRWA provides education, health and welfare services to millions of Palestinian refugees in the occupied West Bank, al-Quds, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

The Zionist regime has been campaigning to defund the UN agency in an attempt to end the refugees' right of return. The crisis deepened after former U.S. president Donald Trump decided to cancel funding to UNRWA in 2018.

The vast majority of Gazans are refugees who were kicked out of their towns and villages upon the establishment of the regime in 1948.

Palestinian refugees who suffered for more than seven decades say UNRWA cuts will only increase their plight amid the Coronavirus pandemic. Over 1.3 million Palestinian refugees live in the Gaza Strip and their hardships have increased under the Zionist regime's blockade.