

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime on Friday banned the raising of the Muslim call to prayer at the Ibrahim Mosque in occupied al-Khalil under the pretext that settlers were celebrating the Jewish holiday of Purim.

The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the ban was “a call for religious war” and went on to urge the international community and the relevant UN organizations and councils to assume their legal and moral responsibilities in protecting holy sites.

Submission to Allah's Will is the best companion; wisdom is the noblest heritage; theoretical and practical knowledge are the best signs of distinction; deep thinking will present the clearest picture of every problem.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Yemenis Stage Nationwide Protests Against Saudi Blockade

SANA'A (Dispatches) – Tens of thousands of people staged rallies across Yemen on Friday in protest the Saudi regime's atrocities and its blockade and closure of Sana'a International Airport.

Protesters flooded the streets in the Damt district of the southern Yemeni province of Dhale in a rally entitled “The Siege of the Coalition of Aggression is Killing Yemeni People.”

They chanted slogans against the United States and the Zionist regime for supporting the Saudi blockade of war-ravaged Yemen, which has made it impossible for food and medical supplies to reach the poor in the war-torn country.

People in southeastern province of Dhamar, central province of al-Bayda, the northern province of al-Jawf as well as the southwestern province of Ibb, as well as western port city of Hudaydah and the northern province of Hajjah held rallies.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched the war on Yemen in March 2015, with the goal of bringing the government of former president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, back to power and crushing the popular Ansarullah movement.

The United Nations says Yemen has the world's largest humanitarian crisis, with 80 percent of the people in need of help.

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and



Yemeni demonstrators participate in a rally in protest against the Saudi-led military aggression and blockade in the capital Sana'a.

Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, has urged Persian Gulf Arab states to donate more money to avert a large-scale “man-made” famine in Yemen.

Lowcock said on Wednesday that the world body had managed to prevent famine in the period 2018-2019 due to a well-funded aid appeal, warning that the world would be witnessing the worst famine in decades in case a sum of \$3.85 billion the UN needs is not raised at a virtual pledging conference on Monday.

“What is alarming and what is different about the situation we're in now is

that there's been such a big drop off in support for the aid operation that we've been cutting aid to starving people - not in an isolated way, in a way that affects millions of people all over the country,” he pointed out.

Lowcock went on to say that the United Nations in 2020 only received just over half the \$3.4 billion it needed, saying it was largely because of smaller contributions from Persian Gulf countries.

Earlier this week, Lowcock said some 16 million people in Yemen are going hungry and five million of those people are “just one step away from famine.”

Some 400,000 children under the age of five are severely malnourished, he said.

“Those children are in their last weeks and months,” he warned. “They are starving to death.”

In another development, Yemeni army forces and allied fighters from Popular Committees launched a missile strike on Thursday against a position of Saudi-led militants in Yemen's strategic central province of Ma'rib, killing and wounding scores of them.

Yemeni military sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Lebanon-based and Arabic-language al-Mayadeen television news network that the missile struck with precision a gathering of Saudi-led military commanders and officers in the so-called Third Military Region of Ma'rib.

The sources added that a number of senior Saudi-led mercenaries were killed and wounded as a result.

Earlier in the day, an unnamed source said the Yemeni military forces and Popular Committees fighters repelled an attack by Saudi-backed militants loyal to Yemen's former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi against al-Zour area in the Sirwah district.

The source noted that a number of military vehicles belonging to Hadi loyalists and Saudi-led militants were destroyed, adding that several pro-Hadi militants and Saudi mercenaries were killed and injured as well.

Lavrov: U.S. Plans to Stay in Syria, Destroy Country



Mask-clad U.S. troops walk during a patrol near an oil production facility in the countryside near al-Malikiyah (Derik), in Syria's northeastern Hasakah Province, on October 27, 2020.

DAMASCUS (Sputnik) – Moscow has evidence of U.S. plans to keep troops deployed in Syria indefinitely, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said.

“We have recently received different information from various sources. We cannot confirm it for now, and want to ask the Americans about this directly. Supposedly, they are making the decision to never leave Syria, even to the point of destroying the country,” Lavrov said, speaking to reporters at a press conference alongside his Afghan counterpart Mohammad Hanif Atmar on Friday.

Commenting on Thursday night's U.S. airstrikes, the foreign minister said that the U.S. side only provided the Russian military a few minutes' warning before carrying out the attacks.

“Our military was warned four or five minutes ahead of time. Of course, even if we are talking about deconfliction, as is customary in ties between Russian and U.S. military personnel, this is nothing. This was a kind of notification when the strike

was already being carried out,” Lavrov said.

The Russian diplomat also suggested that it's impossible to consider the strikes separately “from the fact that the U.S. is present on Syrian territory illegally, in violation of all norms of international law, including Security Council Resolutions on reconciliation in the Syrian Arab Republic.”

Lavrov went on to blast Washington over its efforts to pressure other countries to prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid to Syria, and efforts to obstruct reconstruction efforts.

“They continue to play the separatism card. They continue to block, using their levers of pressure on other states, any supply even of humanitarian aid, not to mention equipment and materials necessary to restoring the economy in the territories controlled by the government, and in every way possible force their allies to invest in territories outside Damascus's control,” he said. “At the same time, they illegally exploit Syria's hydrocarbon resources.”

U.S. Report on Khashoggi Singles Out bin Salman: Sources

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – A declassified version of a U.S. intelligence report expected to be released finds that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman approved the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, four U.S. officials familiar with the matter said.

The officials said the report, for which the CIA was the main contributor, assessed that the crown prince approved and likely ordered the murder of Khashoggi, whose Washington Post column had criticized the crown prince's policies.

President Joe Biden, a Democrat who succeeded the Republican Donald Trump five weeks ago, told reporters Wednesday he had read the report.

The report's release is part of

Biden's policy to realign ties with Riyadh after years of giving the Arab ally and major oil producer a pass on its human rights record and its devastating war on Yemen.

Biden is working to restore the relationship with Riyadh to traditional lines after four years of cozier ties under Trump.

Biden spoke for the first time since becoming president with Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on Thursday ahead of releasing the report about the murder of Khashoggi.

He “affirmed the importance the United States places on universal human rights and the rule of law”, the White House said in a brief statement after the call.

“Our administration is focused on recalibrating the relationship,”

White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters on Thursday before the call.

“Certainly, there are areas where we will express concerns and leave open the option of accountability,” Psaki said.

“There are also areas where we will continue to work with Saudi Arabia given the threats they face in the region,” she said.

Khashoggi, a former advocate of the Saudi royal court who later became a critic, was killed in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, 2018, after he entered the premises to collect documents for his planned wedding to his Turkish fiancée Hatice Cengiz.

Leaked Saudi documents show that the assassination squad that

killed the Saudi dissident journalist fled to Istanbul on private jets owned by a company under the full control of the Saudi crown prince, a report says.

Citing official documents labeled “Top Secret” and signed by a Saudi minister, the CNN reported late on Wednesday that the ownership of the company Sky Prime Aviation had in 2017 been transferred to Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, which is the country's \$400-billion sovereign wealth fund, and the company's planes were later used in the October 2018 killing of Khashoggi.

The sovereign wealth fund is controlled by the Saudi royal family and is chaired by the 35-year-old crown prince.

Palestinian Health Minister Recommends Lockdown Amid Surge

West Bank (Dispatches) – The Palestinian Health Ministry has recommended a two-week lockdown amid a surge in coronavirus infections across the West Bank.

Palestinian Authority's Health Minister Mai al-Kaila suggested Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh implement a comprehensive closure as positive cases have increased by some 20-30 percent, while hospital beds in several places are nearing full capacity, according to a statement on the ministry website.

“This is the third wave of the coronavirus outbreak in Palestine,” al-Kaila told local media on Friday. “And it is the most difficult period we have experienced since the beginning of the pandemic.”

The marked increase in the number of infected people is linked to the appearance of the new strains first reported in the United

Kingdom and South Africa, the minister said, adding that cases related to the Brazilian strain have not been detected so far.

Coronavirus cases in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip have reached nearly 180,000, while more than 2,000 people have died, according to Johns Hopkins University.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has condemned the Zionist regime's promise to send coronavirus vaccines to far-away countries while ignoring the five-million-strong Palestinian population living kilometers away under its military occupation as an “immoral measure”.

On Thursday, Honduras received its first shipment of COVID-19 vaccines from the occupying regime, after Israeli media reported earlier this week the regime's intention to send vaccines to the Central American country, in

addition to Guatemala, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Kan Public Broadcasting reported that 100,000 Moderna vaccines will be shipped to 15 allies of the occupying regime, as well as several countries in Africa that have strong or growing ties with the regime.

Guatemala followed the United States' controversial decision to move its embassy to al-Quds last year, while Honduras has promised to do the same.

Hungary has set up a trade mission office in al-Quds, and the Czech Republic has pledged to open a diplomatic office in the city as well.

The PA's minister of foreign affairs, Riyad al-Malki, said the regime's decision to provide vaccines to countries in exchange for political concessions is a form of “political blackmail and an immoral measure”.

German Cabinet Agrees to Extend Afghan Occupation

KABUL (Dispatches) – German troops are likely to stay on in Afghanistan as the government has agreed to extend its military mandate in the country by 10 months.

The new draft mandate still needs the approval of the Bundestag, the lower house of parliament.

The current mandate is set to expire at the end of March.

Under the draft agreed by Chancellor Angela Merkel's Cabinet, German troops would be able to stay in the war-ravaged country until January 31, 2022.

With over 1,100 troops, Germany has the second-largest contingent after the United States in NATO's Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan.

Seibert said that the maximum limit of 1,300 German troops will remain unchanged in the new mandate.

The decision comes a week after NATO said it had made “no final decision” on the future of the mission.

Several groups in German parliament, not least the liberal FDP and the far-left Die Linke, recent-

ly urged a strategy of disengagement after 20 years of military presence in Afghanistan.

The new mandate will cover the months after the September general election necessary to form a new German government.

A new decision on the German military presence will be taken by the new lawmakers.

NATO deployed forces to Afghanistan following the 2001 U.S.-led invasion, which extended insecurity in Afghanistan.

The United States, under former President Donald Trump, reached an agreement with the Taliban in Qatar in February 2020, under which the U.S. and its NATO allies are expected to withdraw all troops in 14 months.

The administration of President Joe Biden, however, has said it would not commit to a full withdrawal by May.

The Taliban have warned that the longer the U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan, the more troops will be killed.

Trump in his final days in office unilaterally reduced the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan to 2,500, the lowest since 2001.