

DUBAI (Dispatches) – Persian Gulf Cooperation Council countries will see their economies shrink by 7.6% this year amid low oil prices and the new coronavirus crisis, a senior International Monetary Fund official said on Tuesday.

Jihad Azour, director of the IMF's Middle East and Central Asia Department, was speaking at a virtual economic forum.

In this world, man is a target of death, an easy prey to calamities, here every morsel and every draught is liable to choke one, here one never receives a favor until he loses another instead.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Partial or Complete...

Palestine Rejects Zionist Annexation Plan



Palestinian protesters take part in a rally against the Zionist regime's plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank, in the Jabalya refugee camp in northern Gaza Strip on June 27, 2020.

RAMALLAH (Dispatches) – Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas says that the Zionist regime's plan of annexing parts of the West Bank is rejected, whether it is partial or complete.

Abbas's announcement was made in a telephone conversation with Simonetta Sommaruga, president of the Swiss Confederation, the of-

ficial Wafa news agency reported. The report said that Abbas stressed that the Palestinians reject the U.S. Mideast plan, adding that it violates all the international resolutions.

The Swiss president said that Switzerland opposes any unilateral actions or any changes that violate international law and the international legitimacy, and called for the

Zionist regime and the Palestinians for a dialogue.

Sommaruga told Abbas that her country will continue providing support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, mainly in the field of health to combat the coronavirus pandemic.

In another development, during

an online meeting with 40 British lawmakers, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Ishtaye accused the occupying regime of planning to dissolve the Palestinian Authority (PA), adding that the Palestinians will not let the regime do so "because the PA was the result of the Palestinian struggle."

"The Israeli annexation plan threatens the existence of the Palestinian people and their just cause and also threatens security and stability in the region," said Ishtaye.

The Zionist regime is planning to annex more than 30 percent of the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley. It also plans to impose its so-called 'sovereignty' on several illegal settlements in the territory.

Tension between the two sides has mounted after Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that his annexation plan will be implemented on July 1.

The United Nations top human rights official Michelle Bachelet has called on the Zionist regime to halt its 'illegal' plans to annex part of occupied Palestinian territory in the West Bank and warned it could lead to deadly clashes.

"Annexation is illegal. Period," Bachelet said in a statement. "I am deeply concerned that even the most minimalist form of annexation would lead to increased violence and loss of life."

U.S. Seeks to Prolong Stay in Iraq Through Raids on PMU: MP



Members of anti-terror Kata'ib Hezbollah group, which is part of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), wave the group's flags as they walk along a street painted in the colors of the Zionist regime's flag during a parade marking the International Quds Day on the last Friday of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan in Baghdad, Iraq.

BAGHDAD (Press TV) – An Iraqi legislator and leader of the State of Law Coalition has denounced the recent raid on a headquarters of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), better known by the Arabic word Hashd al-Sha'abi, in southern Baghdad, saying the United States is seeking to prolong its military presence in the country through such bids.

"The U.S. is looking for an excuse to extend the deployment of its military forces in Iraq by means of provocative acts against Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters and assaults on their headquarters," Mohammed al-Sahyoud said in an exclusive interview with Arabic-language al-Maalomah news agency on Tuesday.

He added, "We must stand committed to the PMU and the resistance front as two main and matchless options in order to strengthen state bodies and counter the challenges being posed by the United States against the political process in Iraq."

"Our commitment to the PMU and Islamic resistance groups will frustrate U.S. schemes and those of its agents, who are trying to

overthrow the political process in the country," Sahyoud pointed out.

In the unprecedented raid on June 25 against the headquarters of Kata'ib Hezbollah, a PMU faction, Iraqi forces arrested a dozen of its members for allegedly planning a rocket attack on Baghdad's Green Zone, where the U.S. and other embassies as well as state buildings are located.

Baghdad later dropped all the charges against the detained PMU forces and released them on Monday.

The PMU members were released on Monday and all charges against them were dropped, Kata'ib Hezbollah's military spokesman Jaafar al-Husseini told AFP.

"The judge ordered their release due to a lack of evidence. The arrests shouldn't have happened," the spokesman said.

He said they had appeared at a Hashd military tribunal, as Iraq's various security forces each have their own court system.

Kata'ib Hezbollah is a military unit operating under the PMU - an Iraqi umbrella group which includes more than 40 militia groups fighting terrorism.

UN Calls for \$10bn Aid for Syrians

NEW YORK (Dispatches) – Governments are set to pledge billions of dollars in aid for Syrians at a virtual conference to help refugees enduring Syria's ninth year of foreign-backed war, as the coronavirus and high food prices and sanctions by the U.S. and EU worsen the plight of millions.

This year, the United Nations is looking for almost \$10bn for people in Syria and surrounding countries. It hopes much of that will come from the 60 governments and non-governmental agencies gathering by video link. The European Union is hosting the event.

The pledging, now an annual event, breaks down into a UN appeal of \$3.8bn for aid inside Syria and \$6.04bn for countries hosting refugees. Only a fraction has been raised so far.

In a report last week, the EU said in 2019 donors contributed \$10bn in grants to Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

"The needs have never been greater," said Corinne Fleischer at the World Food Programme, a UN agency.

In Syria, more than 11 million people need aid and protection, the UN says, while 6.6 million have fled to neighboring countries in the world's largest refugee crisis.

Many Syrians face unprecedented hunger, with more than 9.3 million people lacking adequate food, while the country's coronavirus outbreak could accelerate, the UN has said.

The combination of an economic slump and coronavirus lockdown measures and sanc-

tions by the EU and U.S. have pushed food prices more than 200 percent higher in less than a year, according to the World Food Programme.

"The COVID-19 crisis has had an immediate and devastating impact on livelihoods of millions of Syrian refugees and their hosts in the region," UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Syria has called on the United Nations to prepare a report on the legality of economic sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union against the country under the international law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

Syrian Ambassador to the UN Bashar al-Ja'afari, in two identi-

cal letters addressed to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the rotating President of the Security Council Nicolas de Riviere, urged the world body to assign competent legal and political authorities with the task of preparing an urgent report on the extent to which punitive measures imposed by the U.S. administration and the 27-member EU are compatible with the UN Charter, international law, international humanitarian fundamentals and the Security Council decisions.

Ja'afari highlighted that the report should shed light on the harmful effects that the sanctions have had on the lives of ordinary Syrians, and on the ability of the United Nations to implement its humanitarian assistance programs in Syria.

Turkish Lawyers Protest Against Gov't Plan to Reform Bar Associations

ISTANBUL (Reuters) – Thousands of Turkish lawyers protested outside Istanbul's main courthouse on Tuesday against a government plan to reform bar associations, saying it aims to silence dissent and will lead to politicization of their profession.

Under a draft law presented to parliament on Tuesday by President Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AK Party, multiple bar associations could be formed in each of Turkey's provinces. Only one is currently allowed per province.

AK Party lawmaker Cahit Ozkan told reporters the bill was needed because bar associations were no longer able to function properly follow-

ing a 13-fold increase in the number of lawyers in Turkey since the existing law first came into effect.

New lawyers would now be allowed to register with any bar in the province, according to the draft law.

The protesters say it is an attempt to dilute the existing bar associations, which have emerged as leading critics of the Erdogan government's record on the rule of law and human rights.

The associations say the judicial system has descended into chaos with lawyers jailed, defenses muzzled and confidence in judges and prosecutors destroyed.

"Lawyers being registered with different bars will lead to division. Lawyers will be classified according to their bars... We think there are serious dangers," said one lawyer at the protest who declined to give her name.

Mehmet Durakoglu, head of the Istanbul Bar Association, said his association would continue to fight against the bill, even though it is likely to become law given the majority that the AK Party and its nationalist MHP allies have in parliament.

"We will use our democratic rights to the end so that (the bill) does not pass," he told the protesters.

IOM: 100,000 Displaced in Yemen in 2020 Due to War, COVID-19

SANA'A (Dispatches) – Some 100,000 people have been displaced in war-torn Yemen since the beginning of the year due to the Saudi-led war and the coronavirus pandemic, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) announced.

In its report, the organization said: "16,601 families (99,606 people) have been displaced at least once, since the first of last January, and until 27 June."

"The displacement of 191 additional families was recorded last week, including 80 families in Lahij governorate (south of Yemen), 65 families in Marib (east), and 46 families in Taiz (southwest)."

The IOM indicated that "the reasons for displacement have multiplied, as 112 families from Aden Governorate (south) left their homes due to the coronavirus outbreak, as well as 54 families from Al-Bayda Governorate (central) and 49 families from Al Hudaydah Governorate (west) fled the fights."

As of Sunday evening, Ye-

men has recorded 1,118 cases of coronavirus infections, including 302 deaths.

The war in Yemen has led to the world's worst humanitarian crises according to the UN, as more than two-thirds of the population are in need of humanitarian aid, amid the total collapse of the healthcare services.

Saudi Arabia and a number of its regional allies launched a devastating war on Yemen in March 2015 in order to reinstall a Riyadh-backed former regime and crush the Ansarullah movement.

The U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nonprofit conflict-research organization, estimates that the war has claimed more than 100,000 lives over the past five years.

The Western-backed Saudi military aggression, coupled with a naval blockade, has plunged Yemen into what the UN calls the world's worst humanitarian crisis.