

### Fire at Kuwait Refinery Kills 2, Injures 5

DUBAI (AP) — A fire erupted in Kuwait during maintenance work at a major oil refinery on Friday, killing two workers and critically injuring five others, the Kuwait National Petroleum Company said. This is the second fire to erupt at the Mina al-Ahmedi oil refinery in as little as three months. In October, the state-owned oil company reported a fire had erupted at the facility, with some workers suffering from smoke inhalation and others being treated for light burns. In this latest fire, the company said, two Asian contract workers died. Their bodies were discovered on site.

### Thought for Today

I wonder at the arrogance of a haughty and vain person. Yesterday he was only a drop of semen and tomorrow he will turn into a corpse.

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# Memo: Bush, Blair Didn't Care About Iraq After Invasion

BAGHDAD (Middle East Eye)

Former U.S. president George W. Bush told former British prime minister Tony Blair he did not know who would replace Saddam Hussein in Iraq when they toppled him and that he "did not much care", according to an explosive top secret account of the meeting. The former U.S. president was blithe about the consequences of launching an invasion at a crucial meeting with the British prime minister at his Texas ranch in 2002, almost a year before the war was launched.

"He didn't know who would take Saddam's place if and when we toppled him. But he didn't much care," the British memo, written by Blair's top foreign policy adviser at the time, reads.

Bush believed - but the memo says he would not say publicly - that the Iraq invasion should go forwards in a way to appease Saudi Arabia - a close U.S. ally.

Bush also "reassured the Turks that there was no question of the break-up of Iraq and the emergence of a Kurdish state".



Protesters wearing masks of Tony Blair (L), and George W. Bush (R) assemble outside the conference center where the Iraq Inquiry was launched in London.

The memo also reveals how as early as April 2002, more than eight months before United Nations weapons inspectors went into Iraq, Blair was aware that they might have to "adjust their approach" should Saddam give them free rein.

This is believed to be the first reference to a strategy which ended with the creation of the infamous "dodgy dossier" of concocted intelligence making the case for war,

key details of which were later admitted to be false.

The memo hardens the central findings of the public inquiry into the war led by John Chilcot which concluded in 2016 that the UK chose to join the invasion before peaceful options had been explored, that Blair deliberately exaggerated the threat posed by Saddam, and that Bush ignored advice on post-war planning.

It was written by David Manning, Blair's top foreign policy adviser, one day after the meeting at the president's ranch in Crawford, Texas, on Saturday 6 April 2002.

Apart from Bush and Blair, only a handful of officials were present from both sides, and much of the discussion between the two leaders was conducted one-on-one.

The president and prime minister had developed a particularly close relationship in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 Al-Qaeda attacks in the U.S., following which Blair had pledged to "stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends". The two trusted and confided in each other more than they did some of their own colleagues.

The UK had been a key supporter and participant in the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. Iraq, which had long been subject to UN sanctions imposed over Saddam Hussein's weapons programs, had also been in U.S. sights since the launch of the so-called "war on terror".

## Zionist Troops Violently Suppress Palestinians in Naqab



Protesters held up signs saying, 'The Naqab's land are for its people,' during Thursday's demonstration.

BEER AL-SABE (Al Jazeera) - Dozens of Palestinian Bedouins have been wounded in a crackdown by Zionist troops on a peaceful protest against the occupying regime's continuing forestation work on land residents privately own near the southern city of Beer al-Sabe.

Some 500 protesters took part in Thursday's demonstration, which began at 3pm (13:00 GMT). They were met with hundreds of Zionist troops who fired rubber-coated bullets, tear gas, stun grenades, as well as skunk water.

At least 15 protesters were arrested, according to local media reports. The demonstration took place at the entrance to the Palestinian Bedouin village of Sa'wa at a main highway intersection on Route 31, east of Beer al-Sabe.

Huda Abu Obeid, a local activist, said the police attacked the protest shortly after it began.

"They used a lot of violence, beatings; there are people injured and others detained," she told Al Jazeera.

The recent escalation began on Monday, when Zionist regime bulldozers arrived with heavy police protection in the nearby village of al-Atrash and razed Bedouin farming lands, in order to plant trees.

Bedouin Palestinians protested against the move and confrontations have continued for days. Videos and images shared on social media showed Zionist troops violently arresting and beating residents who arrived to defend the lands they use

for farming wheat and barley.

Most Bedouin communities in the south are not recognized by the Zionist regime. They are deprived of basic services such as water and electricity.

The Negev desert is historically inhabited by Arab tribes, socially related to the tribes of Sinai, the Arabian Peninsula and Jordan. The Palestinian Authority says the Zionist regime is committing crimes against Palestinians in the Negev region.

Meanwhile, Zionist regime authorities have forced a Palestinian to demolish a commercial unit in the occupied Al-Quds, as Tel Aviv continues to press ahead with its illegal settlement expansion and land grab policies across the Palestinian territories despite international outcry.

The Palestinian media reported on Thursday that the regime authorities left Jamal Mohammad Ali with no choice but to totally knock down a commercial store belonging to him in Shuafat refugee camp.

The Palestinian resident had to begin demolishing the structure, which had an area of 150 square meters and was still under construction, with his own hands to avoid paying unreasonable demolition costs to the regime's municipality.

Also on Wednesday, Zionist troops tore down about a dozen Palestinian-owned buildings and structures in the occupied West Bank city Al-Khalil. They forced their way and carried out a large-scale demolition campaign east of Yatta town, south of Al-Khalil.

## UN Chief Warns Millions of Afghans on 'Verge of Death'

UNITED NATIONS (AP) - The United Nations chief warned Thursday that millions of Afghans are on the "verge of death," urging the international community to fund the UN's \$5 billion humanitarian appeal, release Afghanistan's frozen assets and jump-start its banking system to avert economic and social collapse.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told reporters that "freezing temperatures and frozen assets are a lethal combination for the people of Afghanistan," and "rules and conditions that prevent money from being used to save lives and the economy must be suspended in this emergency situation."

Afghanistan's aid-dependent

economy was already stumbling when the Taliban seized power in mid-August amid the chaotic departure of U.S. and NATO troops after 20 years. The U.S. and some Western countries froze Afghanistan's assets abroad and halted economic support, unwilling to work with the Taliban.

The UN says 8.7 million Afghans are on the brink of starvation and Guterres said it's critical to rapidly inject liquidity into the Afghan economy "and avoid a meltdown that would lead to poverty, hunger and destitution for millions."

It's "absolutely essential" to avoid a breakdown, he stressed, "because with the present situation you have Afghans on the

verge of death."

The secretary-general said the United States has "a very important role to play because" the United States has frozen \$7 billion in Afghan foreign reserves, mainly held in the U.S.

UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths and Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, are scheduled to hold a virtual meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Guterres said one reason for the meeting is to try and create "mechanisms that allow for an effective injection of funds into the Afghan economy and, at the same time, create the conditions for the financial system in Afghanistan to be able to operate

in the local currency."

The UN chief said international funding should be allowed to pay the salaries of doctors, sanitation workers, electrical engineers and other civil servants as well as help Afghan institutions deliver health care, education and other key services.

Last month, the World Bank transferred \$280 million from a reconstruction trust fund it administers for Afghanistan to the UN children's agency, UNICEF, and the World Food Program for their operations in the country, Guterres said.

"I hope the remaining resources — more than \$1.2 billion — will become available to help Afghanistan's people survive the winter," he said.

## UK MPs Slam London for Prioritizing Bahrain Trade Above Human Rights

LONDON (Dispatches) - A group of British MPs condemned the UK government's "blind eye" over human rights abuses in Bahrain and called for an end of funding to the kingdom during a backbench debate on Thursday.

Ten years after the kingdom's 2011 pro-democracy uprising - and the Bahraini government's subsequent crackdown - the MPs expressed exasperation over the UK's staunch support for its longtime ally given the ongoing repression in the country.

Their criticism comes as 1,400 political prisoners, including many imprisoned for their roles in the uprising, remain behind bars, accusing authorities of unfair trials and torture.

The UK has financially supported Bahrain for a decade, including through the opaquely run Persian Gulf Strategy Fund. In August, the government disclosed that the fund is supporting Bahrain's interior ministry and four other bodies which oversee detainees.

"After a decade of Britain love-bombing Bah-

rain, there has been no improvement in their behavior," said Scottish National Party MP Brendan O'Hara, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Democracy and Human Rights in the Persian Gulf, who raised the debate.

The discussion, O'Hara noted, coincided with the 190th day of a hunger strike by Abduljalil al-Singace.

Singace, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for his pro-democracy activism during the popular Bahraini uprising, has been on hunger strike since July 18 last year in protest against his mistreatment at notorious Jau prison.

Liberal Democrat MP Alistair Carmichael also called for the Bahraini Minister of Interior Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifah to be placed under Magnitsky sanctions "for his role in overseeing appalling human rights violations and a culture of impunity".

Meanwhile, for the third consecutive day on Thursday, people in Bahrain kept up their rallies in protest at a Saudi Arabian court's upholding of the death sentence against two Bahraini youths.

The demonstrations were held throughout several Bahraini villages, with participants holding up pictures of the victims, who have been identified as Sadiq Thamer and Jaafar Sultan.

The duo were jailed in Saudi Arabia in 2015 and issued the sentence for allegedly trying to blow up a border crossing linking the island and the kingdom.

They appealed the sentence, but the Saudi Court of Appeals recently upheld the ruling. Both have pled not guilty, denouncing the verdict as politically-motivated.

Bahrain has been cracking down on all forms of dissent since 2011, when it started to face a popular backlash over its heavy-handed treatment of the country's Shia majority.

Saudi Arabia, seen by some observers as Bahrain's "big brother," has been supportive of Manama's suppression campaign, and at one point, even tried to boost the Bahraini crackdown by sending troops and military vehicles over to the island.

## Yemeni Forces Launch Operation to Target UAE-Backed Militants, Daesh

SANA'A (Dispatches) - Yemen's army and its allied Popular Committees have staged a combined missile and drone operation targeting Daesh terrorists as well as militants backed by the United Arab Emirates in the southern province of Shabwah.

The joint forces staged the operation on Thursday as the Emirati-backed militias were nearing the province's Ain District, Yemen's al-Masirah television network reported, citing Spokesman for the Yemeni Armed Forces Brigadier General Yahya Saree.

"UAE mercenaries were targeted accurately," the official said, adding that "large numbers of the mercenaries were killed and injured in the joint operation."

No earlier than on Wednesday, the allied defense forces pushed successfully back against the Abu Dhabi's loyalists and Daesh terrorists, liberating hundreds of square kilometers of land in the province.

Announcing the victory, Saree said the Wednesday operation killed more than 515 militants and Daesh terrorists, including high-profile militant commanders, while over 850 others were

wounded.

Shabwah lies directly south of the strategic Ma'rib Province, where the Yemeni forces have likewise been making great advances and are on the verge of liberating the provincial capital.

Meanwhile, fighter jets of the war coalition, led by Saudi Arabia, carried out new aerial assaults on residential areas in the Yemeni provinces of Sana'a and Hudaydah, killing at least two civilians.

Early on Thursday, Yemen's al-Masirah TV channel reported that Saudi-led warplanes had targeted areas in Sana'a's Sanhan district and inflicted damage to a hospital there.

Four hospital staffers were injured, two of them critically.

Similar airstrikes on Hudaydah's al-Garrahi district also claimed the lives of two Yemenis, according to a separate al-Masirah report.

Saudi Arabia launched the devastating military aggression against its southern neighbor in March 2015 in collaboration with a number of its allied states and with arms and logistics support from the U.S. and several Western states.