

ANKARA (Middle East Eye) – Finland’s defense minister, Mikko Savola, has granted a military export permit to Turkey, a first since 2019, when European countries placed an arms embargo on Ankara over a military operation in Syria. Last year, Turkey said it would only ratify Sweden and Finland’s accession to NATO if they removed their arms exports restrictions on the Turkish defence sector.

Savola told Finnish newspaper Helsingin Sanomat that he personally made the decision to grant export permits for protective steel that could be used for military vehicles.

He who condones a shameful act, then it is as if he were a participant.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Top Bahraini Cleric: Qur'an Burning Has Nothing to Do With Freedom of Thought

MANAMA (Dispatches) – Bahrain’s most prominent Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim has strongly condemned the burning of a copy of Qur’an, Islam’s holy book, by a Swedish-Danish right-wing extremist in Stockholm, emphasizing that such sacrilegious acts and hate crimes cannot be counted as an instance of freedom of thought.

“The desecration of the Holy Qur’an by an extremist and radical person, identified as Rasmus Paludan – the leader of the Stram Kurs Party, under the protection of police and with permission from the government, outside the Turkish embassy in Stockholm cannot be viewed as an individual crime but rather a state offense,” Sheikh Qassim said in a statement.

He added that the imprudent move indicates the extent of desperation of Paludan and the Swedish government, and that all crimes committed in some European countries against Islamic sanctities and values are of the same nature.

“It would be incredibly insane to



Thousands of people gathered in the Turkish city of Batman against the desecration of the Qur'an in Sweden and protested the scandal.

count such vile and brazen attacks on religious values as freedom of thought and speech. Its initiators and sponsors hold the belief that like other animals, human beings are allowed to do or obtain anything they would deem desirable,” Sheikh Qassim noted.

The distinguished Bahraini Shia cleric also stressed that insults,

lies, slander, hypocrisy and desecration of sacred values can by no means be regarded as freedom of opinion.

“If not, why don’t they allow anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial and the burning of so-called pride flags? Aren’t such measures designed to restrict personal freedoms?” Sheikh Qassim ques-

tioned.

“The ongoing desecration of sanctities in the West, just as it took place on Saturday before the eyes of more than a billion people and amid the silence and support of European governments, explicitly shows the evil intention to create sedition and chaos worldwide and undermine global security,” he noted.

The top Bahraini cleric finally called on concerned intellectuals and scholars to stop the wicked approach, which would lead to unbridled spread of terror, and to denounce it for the sake of world’s peace and stability.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry condemned the burning of Qur’an in Stockholm as a “vile attack.”

In response to Sweden’s permission of the incident, Ankara canceled Swedish Defense Minister Pal Jonson’s visit to Turkey.

Many Arab and Muslim countries – including Iran, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Kuwait – also denounced the Qur’an burning.

Report: Zionist Regime’s Greatest Threat in 2023 Is Losing Allies

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The biggest strategic threat currently facing the Zionist regime is the deterioration in its foreign relations, particularly with the United States, mainly due to the new cabinet’s attempts to weaken the judiciary, a leading Israeli security think tank has warned.

Every year, the Institute for National Security Studies releases a report detailing what it deems to be the greatest threat the occupying regime is facing. In previous years the renowned institute, affiliated with Tel Aviv University, has cited Iran, the war in Syria, and Hezbollah resistance movement’s precision missile project.

This year, its annual assessment, warned that prime min-

ister Benjamin Netanyahu’s far-right cabinet may take measures that will be perceived by the West as damaging, which could endanger the occupying regime’s relations with Washington and its security in the long run.

The report said the regime’s attempts to make changes to the judicial system will increase polarization within the occupied territories, consequently weakening resilience - “a critical component in Israel’s ability to cope with external threats”.

In early January, the new cabinet, the most right-wing in the regime’s history, laid out plans to overhaul the judicial system.

If implemented, the so-called reforms are expected to weaken

the judiciary, which Netanyahu and his coalition of far-right and ultra-Orthodox parties accuse of advancing a left-wing agenda through key court rulings.

The plan, which has sparked massive protests in Tel Aviv and Al-Quds, would also leave the door open for the regime to quash corruption charges Netanyahu is facing.

Meanwhile, tensions between the judiciary and the regime have escalated in recent days following a supreme court ruling that disqualified Aryeh Deri, a cabinet minister, from holding political office over past criminal convictions.

Deri is one of Netanyahu’s closest and most experienced

allies and played a central role in his return to power.

The INSS report said the judicial crisis and attempts to pass laws pose a significant risk to the regime’s foreign ties and its relations with western countries.

In the short term, it added, this imperils security and western-Zionist regional interests.

Tamir Hayman, the managing director of INSS, said 2023 poses a host of challenges to the regime in the region.

The report said this could be Netanyahu’s most significant political challenge, and warned that any damage to relations with Washington would “directly impact Israel’s management of other fronts”.

Two More Palestinians Martyred in West Bank



Zionist troops killed two more Palestinians in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Zionist troops shot and killed two Palestinians in the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, Palestinian officials said, the latest deaths in a surge of violence.

Palestinian Health Ministry said Salah Muhammad Ali, 16, was shot in the chest and eventually succumbed to his wounds at a local hospital.

The Palestinian teenager was pronounced dead hours after the regime’s forces raided the camp to raze down the family house of a Palestinian.

The Israeli military raid on the Shuafat refugee camp on Wednesday sparked confrontations with unarmed local youth and armed clashes with Palestinian fighters, according to reports.

The Palestinian Health Ministry identified another Palestinian shot dead shot as Aref Abdel Nasser Lahlouh, 20. The regime’s military claimed the man was carrying a knife and was shot after he attempted to attack a soldier at a military post.

Lahlouh’s death brings to 19 the number of Palestinians killed by Zionist fire this year. Nearly 150 Palestinians were killed last year, making it the deadliest since 2004, according to figures by the Israeli rights group B’Tselem.

Tensions have been high for months as the occupying regime has been conducting nightly arrest raids in the West Bank.

Earlier Wednesday, Zionist troops demolished the home of a Palestinian gunman who allegedly killed a female Zionist soldier in an attack last year.

The home demolition came in the

first weeks of the regime’s new far-right cabinet, which has pushed a hard line against the Palestinians and promised to ramp up settlement building in the occupied West Bank.

Police said some 300 officers and troops entered the Shuafat refugee camp to demolish the home of Uday Tamimi, who the occupying regime said was behind the deadly shooting at a checkpoint in October.

Meanwhile, Jordan’s King Abdullah II has cautioned Netanyahu against attempts at changing the status quo of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in light of increasing desecrations of the holy place.

During a surprise visit Netanyahu paid to Amman on Tuesday, King Abdullah told the far-right Zionist PM that the Israeli regime should respect the “historic and legal status quo in the Holy Al-Aqsa mosque and not violate it.”

The Jordanian king was quoted as telling Netanyahu that an end to violence was crucial to allow long-stalled “peace” talks to resume between the Palestinians and the Zionist regime.

Netanyahu’s return to power has deepened Amman’s concerns that extremist policies, which include accelerated settlement expansion in the Palestinian occupied territories in the West Bank, will lead to a new cycle of violence.

Jordan signed a so-called peace deal with the occupying regime in 1994, but Jordanians are at odds with their government and oppose any form of normalization of ties with the occupying regime.

Coldest Winter in 15 Years Freezing Weather Kills 157 in Afghanistan

KABUL (Mirror) – Around 157 people have tragically died in freezing temperatures in Afghanistan in the past fortnight, Taliban officials say, with the toll doubling in less than a week.

The country is facing its coldest winter in 15 years, with temperatures dropping as low as -34 degrees Celsius.

The ability to firefight the situation has been seriously hampered by the limited amount of aid being distributed, following the Taliban’s ban on female NGO workers.

Acting Minister of Disaster Management Mullah Mohammad Abbas Akhund told the BBC that many areas of Afghanistan were now completely cut off by snow.

Military helicopters had been sent to the rescue, but they couldn’t land in the most mountainous regions.

He said: “We’re concerned about those who are still living in the mountain regions. Most of the roads which pass through the mountains have been closed due to snow. Cars have got stuck there and passengers have died in the freezing temperatures.”

The acting minister said he was very concerned about people’s lives and their livestock which is their lifeline.

“Most of the people who lost their

lives to the cold were shepherds or people living in rural areas. They didn’t have access to healthcare,” Mullah Akhund said.

Last month, NGOs working in Afghanistan halted their operations in protest of the new Taliban order banning women from working with humanitarian groups.

The 80-90,000 women working in the aid sector had to stop working overnight. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) said on Twitter it was delivering aid such as blankets, heating and shelter to some 565,700 people.

“But much more is needed amid one of the coldest spells in years,” it added.

The lack of a consistent electricity supply in the country forces families to choose between food and heat.

Left without power and freezing in their homes, Afghans often turn to burning wood, coal, and even plastic to heat their homes – leading air pollution to increase by up to 50 percent during the winter months in Kabul, according to the New Humanitarian which says the extra smog also drives up respiratory ailments.

“This winter is by far the coldest in recent years,” said Mohammad Nasim Muradi, the head of Afghanistan’s meteorology office.

Arab Currencies Crash Due to Gov’t Mismanagement, External Pressures

CAIRO (Al Jazeera/AP) – “I cannot feed bridges to my children,” says Muhammad, a driver living in the Nile Delta, in reference to the Egyptian government’s large infrastructure building drive, as the country suffers from a cost-of-living crisis.

“I can hardly afford the most basic necessities. This government has been in power for over eight years. They have done nothing for the average person,” he said angrily.

“This government treated me [when I had] the hepatitis C virus for free,” retorted his friend, Sami, referring to a campaign launched by the Egyptian government in 2014 to treat people living with hepatitis C virus (HCV), one of Egypt’s biggest health challenges.

These heated discussions over inflation and currency devaluations have become commonplace in many Arab countries.

The Iraqi dinar has lost 7 percent of its value since mid-November, leading to the sacking of the central bank governor on Monday.

In September, the Tunisian dinar reached a record low versus, as the country’s president struggles to deal with an ongoing economic and political crisis.

Meanwhile, the currencies of other countries, including Syria, Sudan, Lebanon and Egypt, were among the world’s worst-performing currencies in

2022.

These devaluations, coupled with rising prices around the world, have contributed to sky-high levels of inflation.

According to the Central Bank of Egypt, headline inflation was 21.3 percent in 2022, while core inflation, which excludes volatile fuel and food prices, reached 24.5 percent.

Some people are blaming their governments for inflation. Governments, on the other hand, have tended to point the finger at external factors beyond their control, such as the war in Ukraine, the COVID-19 pandemic and interest rate hikes in the U.S.

Several countries in the region, such as Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, have suffered from a depletion of foreign currency, due to plummeting tourism revenues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as rising food prices triggered by the war in Ukraine.

Currency devaluations are a result of a number of factors, including trade deficits and foreign debt.

“A persistent trade deficit results in a loss of foreign reserves which is often necessary to service foreign lending,” said Dennis McCornac, assistant professor of economics at Georgetown University in Qatar.

On Wednesday, hundreds of protesters rallied near the Central Bank in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, angered by the recent devaluation of the Iraqi dinar and demanding the government take action to stabilize the currency.

The protesters — mainly young people — rallied amid a heavy security presence, with many carrying the Iraqi flag and banners with slogans. One slogan read: “The politicians are the ones covering up the financial corruption for the banks.”

Iraq’s Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani on Monday accepted the resignation of the governor of the country’s Central Bank, Mustafa Ghaleb Mukheef, following a weeks-long plunge of the Iraqi dinar. Mukheef, who had been in the post since 2020, was replaced by Muhsen al-Allaq as acting governor.

Some politicians in Iraq have blamed the drop on recent measures by the U.S. Treasury.

The U.S. has significant control over Iraq’s supply of dollars as Iraq’s foreign reserves are held at the U.S. Federal Reserve. Late last year, the Federal Reserve began imposing stricter measures on transactions, which have slowed the flow of dollars into Iraq, including blacklisting a number of banks from the dollar market over suspected money laundering.