

BEIRUT (Xinhua) – Qatar signed an agreement with Lebanon on Sunday to join the consortium of France's TotalEnergies and Italy's ENI for oil and gas exploration in two blocks in the Lebanese territorial waters, state-owned TV channel Tele Liban reported.

Qatar would participate in the consortium with a 30 percent stake, according to Qatari Minister of Energy Saad Sherida al-Kaabi.

"This agreement is important for Qatar, which gives our country a chance to support economic development in Lebanon," al-Kaabi said.

This world is not a permanent place, it is a passage, a road on which you are passing. There are two kinds of people here: One is the kind of those who have sold their souls for eternal damnation, the other is of those who have purchased their souls and freed them from damnation.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Zionists Step Up Violence Against Palestinians

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime has announced plans to provide illegal settlers with firearms and weapons in response to the recent retaliatory operations by Palestinians, which killed at least seven settlers in the occupied Al-Quds, amid escalating violence in the occupied territories.

Speaking after an emergency meeting, Zionist prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed a "strong, swift and precise" response to the latest retaliatory attacks and said his cabinet, comprised of a group of hardline politicians, had decided to expedite gun permits for Israeli people to defend against Palestinian street attacks.

Netanyahu also announced that his cabinet had decided on a series of steps to "strengthen settlements" in the coming week, without providing further details.

The threats came hours after two retaliatory operations. In a shooting operation carried out on Friday near a synagogue in a settlement in the occupied East Al-Quds seven settlers were killed and 10 others wounded. Two settlers were also injured in another shooting attack in the same area on Saturday.

On Thursday, the Zionist regime's forces raided the city of Jenin and its neighboring refugee camp in the north of the Tel Aviv-



Zionist police are seen at the scene of a shooting attack near the occupied Old City of Al-Quds, on January 28, 2023.

occupied West Bank, gunning down nine Palestinians.

Palestinian resistance groups hailed the retaliatory operation near the synagogue, describing it as a "direct response" to the deadliest Zionist military raid in the occupied West Bank in years.

On Sunday, a young Palestinian man has succumbed to the wounds he suffered days earlier after Zionist troops carried out the raid in Jenin.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said 24-year-old Omar Tareq Saadi died of his serious injuries after being shot in the stomach by the troops during the violent raid on Thursday, Palestine's official Wafa news agency reported.

The Palestinian Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs said Saadi was a former prisoner, who spent about 3 years in the Zionist regime's jails.

On Saturday night, Zionist troops shot and killed a young Palestinian man over an alleged shooting attempt in the northern part of the occupied West Bank.

The Israeli military, in a statement released before midnight on Saturday, alleged that a Palestinian man armed with a handgun was killed near the illegal Kedumim settlement.

Karam Ali Ahmad Salman, 18, was shot dead by "the Israeli occupation near the settlement of

Kedumim," the Palestinian health ministry reported.

According to local Israeli officials, he was spotted on the settlement's surveillance cameras approaching Kedumim's northern neighborhood at around 11:50 p.m. local time (2150 GMT).

The coordinator for the settlement and another guard reached the scene and reportedly spotted that the Palestinian man had pulled out a handgun.

Earlier on Saturday, two illegal settlers were wounded in a shooting attack in occupied East Al-Quds, a day after the seven people were killed in an attack near a synagogue on the outskirts of the city.

An independent Irish Member of the European Parliament (MEP) criticized the European Union (EU) for its silence on Zionist crimes, as the occupying regime continues to commit atrocities against Palestinians across the occupied territories.

Mick Wallace made the remarks in a post on his Twitter account, after the EU released its Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2022, in which there was no mention of the plight of Palestinians.

Wallace denounced the annual report as "selective," noting that it has ignored the persecution and killing of Palestinians by the Zionist regime.

More Muslim Nations Demand European Action on Qur'an Burning



Yemenis participate in a mass rally in Sa'ada, northwestern Yemen, on January 23, 2023, to condemn the burning of a copy of the Holy Qur'an in front of the Turkish embassy in the Swedish capital city of Stockholm.

KUWAIT (Anadolu) – Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have joined a chorus of calls on Europe to take measures against the repeated burning of the Qur'an, Islam's holy book.

On Friday, Swedish-Danish politician Rasmus Paludan, the leader of the far-right Stram Kurs (Hard Line) Party, burned a copy of the Qur'an in front of a mosque in Denmark.

The Islamophobic act came days after the far-right leader burned the Islamic book outside the Turkish Embassy in the Swedish capital, Stockholm, during a police-approved protest.

In a statement, the Saudi Foreign Ministry condemned the Qur'an burning as "a new provocation of the feelings of millions of Muslims worldwide."

"These acts have been repeated in a number of European capitals recently, under the pretext of freedom of expression, without a clear reaction towards stopping these practices," the ministry said.

The ministry called on "all European governments where these extremist violations took place to urgently confront all these practices."

Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah al-Jaber al-Sabah also denounced the Qur'an burning.

In a statement, he called for "taking immediate and serious action to stop these absurd and reprehensible acts, and repeated abuses of Muslim symbols and sanctities, and to hold the perpetrators ac-

countable."

'Danish People Uneasy'

People living in Denmark have expressed their frustration at the burning of a copy of the Qur'an, the holy book for Muslims, by a far-right Swedish-Danish figure.

Anadolu asked the people living in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, for their views on the burning of the Qur'an.

Ane Andresem, a 35-year-old Danish scientist, said that Paludan was just doing it to irritate people.

"So I don't think what he's doing makes any sense. Legally, he can do whatever he wants, he can say whatever he wants, but that doesn't mean it was the right move. The Bible couldn't be burned too. I personally don't care because I'm not Muslim, but I can see the Muslims are frustrated," she said.

Andresem said in countries such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, such acts are "permitted to protect freedom of expression."

A 51-year-old Danish entrepreneur Dorchemie Svain also described Paludan as "a lunatic," saying he did not understand why the police and the state were allowed to devote so much time to this man.

He added: "If it provokes these people, you won't do it. Why are you doing this? I think you shouldn't. Why would you do it if such behavior makes people angry or upset?"

Syria Dismisses OPCW Report on Alleged 2018 Chemical Attack

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – The Syrian Foreign Ministry has slammed as "lacking credibility" a recent report by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) accusing the Syrian air force of being behind a 2018 alleged chemical attack near the capital Damascus.

In a statement, the ministry listed Syria's own accusations and condemnations in response to the OPCW report, pointing at the possible role of the United States in politicizing and fabricating reports about incidents in Syria.

"The report lacks any scien-

tific and objective evidence, and no sane person or specialist can reach the misleading conclusions of its authors, who neglected the objective observations raised by state parties, experts, academics, and former inspectors from the organization who are known for their experience and knowledge," the ministry said.

In the OPCW's report, which came out on Friday, the body's investigators said there were "reasonable grounds to believe" that at least one Syrian air force helicopter had dropped two cylinders of toxic gas on the town

of Douma near the capital Damascus during the alleged incident.

The statement added that "this misleading report did not surprise Syria and proved once again the validity of its position on the OPCW's reports, which lack credibility."

The attack reportedly hit the town on April 7, 2018, with Western countries quickly blaming the alleged incident on the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

A week later, the United States, Britain, and France launched

a coordinated missile attack against sites and research facilities near Damascus and the western Syrian city of Homs with the purported goal of paralyzing the Syrian government's capability to produce chemicals.

Damascus has, however, repeatedly said that no chemical attack had happened on the town at the time and that the incident had been staged by foreign spy agencies to pressure the Syrian government at a time when it was making significant advances against foreign-backed terrorists across the Arab country's soil.

Turkey Issues Travel Warning to Europe Following Protests

ISTANBUL (AP) – Turkey has issued a travel warning for its citizens living in or planning on going to European countries, citing Islamophobia and anti-Turkish demonstrations.

The warning comes after last weekend's protests in Sweden where an anti-Islam activist burned the Qur'an and pro-Kurdish groups protested against Turkey.

The Turkish foreign ministry urged its citizens to take precautions and stay away from demonstration areas. It also said they should go to local authorities if they face xenophobic or racist attacks.

Turkey strongly condemned far-right activist Rasmus Paludan's burning of the Qur'an in Stockholm, which he repeated in Copenhagen Friday. Ankara also sum-

moned the Dutch ambassador after another far-right activist tore pages of the Qur'an in The Hague.

The Turkish government also said there was an increase in anti-Turkish protests by "groups with links to terror groups" — a reference to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has waged a decades-long insurgency against Turkey. Pro-Kurdish groups have been demonstrating in Sweden, waving the flags of the PKK and its affiliates. The protests are a response to Sweden and Finland's promise to prevent the PKK's activities in their countries in order to gain Turkey's approval for their NATO bids.

Following the protests, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned Sweden not

to expect support for its membership bid for the military alliance. Turkey also indefinitely postponed a key meeting in Brussels that would have discussed Sweden and Finland's NATO membership.

Earlier Saturday, before Turkey had issued its travel warning, the Nordic countries separately issued updated travel guidelines for Turkey. Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden urged their citizens visiting Turkey to avoid large gatherings and to exercise caution.

The Swedish Foreign Ministry said in a message on its website that Sweden's embassy in Ankara remains closed to the public and visitors to the country's consulate general in Istanbul are "requested to exercise vigilance."

Blinken Arrives in Egypt on First Stop of Middle East Tour

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Egypt on Sunday in his fourth trip to the region where he is expected to notch down Zionist-Palestinian tensions after an eruption of Israeli violence.

Blinken, who will travel Monday and Tuesday to Al-Quds and Ramallah, had long planned the visit to see the occupying regime's new right-wing cabinet, but the trip takes on a new urgency after some of the worst violence in years.

Blinken will meet Zionist prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas and call "broadly for steps to be taken to de-escalate tensions," State Department spokesman Vedant Patel told reporters.

The violence is also likely to figure in talks between Blinken and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, whose country's traditional role as a Middle East mediator has helped him remain a key U.S. partner despite President Joe Biden's criticism of his human rights record.

Experts questioned whether Blinken could achieve any breakthroughs.

"The absolute best they can do is to keep things stable to avoid another May 2021," said Aaron David Miller, a veteran U.S. negotiator, referring to more than two weeks of fighting between the Zionist regime and Hamas resistance movement that ended with an Egyptian-brokered cease-fire.

Ghaith al-Omari, a former Palestinian official now at The Washington Institute, expected Blinken to repeat traditional U.S. positions rather than break new ground.

"The trip itself is the message," he said.

"Blinken will ask Abbas to do more but it is not clear what they can do," he said, referring to the Palestinians.

Blinken's visit is part of an effort by the Biden administration to engage quickly with Netanyahu, who returned to office in late December leading the most right-wing cabinet in the occupying regime's history.