

BAGHDAD (Xinhua) – The Iraqi security forces has killed three Daesh terrorists and arrested eight others, including two of the group's local ringleaders. A statement issued by the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) said that its forces shot dead a Daesh terrorist on Thursday and arrested another in a raid on a village south of the northern city of Kirkuk, some 250 km north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad. Meanwhile, the CTS forces arrested five Daesh terrorists militants, four of them are non-Iraqi nationals, in an operation in the city of Kirkuk, the statement said.

Man is a wonderful creature; he sees through the layers of fat (eyes), hears through a bone (ears) and speaks through a lump of flesh (tongue).

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Rights Group: Occupying Regime Approves Over 4,000 Settlement Units

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The Zionist regime has advanced plans to build 4,427 housing units for settlers in the occupied West Bank, an Israeli NGO revealed.

The high planning committee of the regime's so-called civil administration - an authority that runs the occupied West Bank - approved 2,791 units and initial endorsements for another 1,636, according to Peace Now, an NGO that monitors settlement expansion on occupied lands.

"This is bad news for Israel and deepens the occupation, making it harder to achieve future peace," Hagit Ofran of Peace Now said.

"The approval of these construction plans in the settlements is a slap in the face, not only to the prospect of [the so-called] peace, but also to the possibility of some future Palestinian economic development."

Nearly 700,000 Zionists live in illegal settlements in the West Bank and East Al-Quds, which the occupying regime illegally occupied during the 1967 war.

Peace Now's report on the settlement expansion increased tensions across the West Bank after the kill-



Zionist settlement of Giv'at Ze'ev, near the Palestinian city of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank

ing of veteran Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh on Wednesday during a Zionist raid on the town of Jenin.

The settlement units will be scattered throughout large areas of the West Bank known as Area C.

Zionist prime minister Naftali Bennett was the former head of a settler lobby organization and has been adamant in his opposition to Palestinian statehood.

Ofran also said it was "disappointing" that the regime was fol-

lowing the similar hostile policies of former Zionist prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu against Palestinians.

In the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah, Bassam al-Salhe, a member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), called on Palestinians to "step up their struggle in the face of these settlement projects."

He also called on the international community "to take deterrent ac-

tion against Israel to compel it to stop settlement and its aggression against our Palestinian people."

Later on Thursday, the European Union condemned and deeply deplored the regime's approval of plans for building nearly 4,500 settler units in the occupied West Bank.

The EU made the remarks in a statement issued by its high representative and foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell.

"The European Union condemns and deeply deplores today's approval, by Israeli authorities, of plans for advancing over 4,400 housing units, further expanding illegal settlements across the occupied West Bank, as well as the retroactive approval of three illegal outposts," the statement said.

All settlements are illegal under international law as they are built on occupied land. The United Nations Security Council has condemned the Zionist regime's settlement activities in the occupied territories in several resolutions.

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent Palestinian state with East Al-Quds as its capital.

Palestinians Hail Iraqi Parliament for Move to Criminalize Zionist Ties



Iraqi demonstrators burn a flag of the Zionist regime during a protest to express solidarity with the Palestinian people amid a flare-up of Zionist-Palestinian violence, in Baghdad, Iraq May 15, 2021.

GAZA (Dispatches) – Palestinian resistance groups have praised the Iraqi parliament's approval of a law criminalizing normalization of ties with the Zionist regime in its first reading.

In a statement received by Quds Press, Hamas said, "The decision expresses the authenticity of the Iraqi people and their well-known positions throughout history in support of the Palestinian people and their just national cause."

The movement welcomed all positions rejecting "the normalization of relations with our nation's common enemy, which threatens its security, stability and capabilities."

It called on "all parliaments in the Arab and Islamic world to follow this honorable measure and to pass similar laws prohibiting all forms of normalization with the usurping Zionist entity."

The Islamic Jihad movement said in a statement that the bill, floated by the political bloc of Iraq's influential Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, is a major step toward fighting the occupiers' efforts to infiltrate into Arab nations.

It said the approval of the draft bill reflects the popular position of Iraq in support of the Palestinian people's rights and their sanctities.

"We salute the Iraqi parliament for

taking a decisive stance at an important juncture to prove that the free Iraqi people stand with Palestinians and the resistance and are against any normalization with the Zionist regime – the main enemy of all Islamic nations," the Islamic Jihad said.

The Iraqi parliament held a session to discuss a proposal for a law prohibiting normalization with the Zionist occupation regime.

Iraq does not have any relations with the regime and the government and political forces refuse to normalize with it.

Back in September 2020, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signed normalization deals with the regime. Morocco and Sudan later signed similar agreements with the regime as well.

The so-called Abraham Accords were pushed by the U.S. under former president Donald Trump.

Palestinians have denounced the normalization deals, describing them as a "stab in the back" and a "betrayal" to their cause.

Back in late November last year, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry reiterated Baghdad's support for the Palestinian cause, stressing that the Arab country categorically rejects any normalization scheme with the regime.

UNSC Holds Emergency Session on Taliban Crackdown on Women

NEW YORK (AP) – The UN Security Council held emergency closed consultations Thursday on the Taliban's latest crackdown on Afghan women as it considered a presidential statement that would express deep concern at its new ban on women leaving home "without necessity" and wearing head-to-toe clothing when they do go out in public.

The Norwegian-drafted statement would also call for a reversal of policies that restrict the rights of women and girls.

Taliban came to power last August and have turned back the clock in Afghanistan to their rule from 1996 until December 2001 when they were ousted from power by U.S. forces following the 9/11 attacks in the United States, with girls and women still

the main target.

In addition to Saturday's new order on leaving home and clothing, girls are now banned from going to school beyond the sixth grade, women are barred from most jobs and from boarding planes if they travel unaccompanied by a male relative, and men and women can only visit public parks on separate days.

Norway's deputy UN ambassador Trine Heimerback told reporters before the council meeting that the Taliban's policies are focusing on oppressing women and girls rather than addressing the country's "catastrophic economic and humanitarian situation," which she warned may lead "to violence and radicalization."

Ireland and Mexico, co-chairs of the Security Council Informal

Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, sent a letter to council members Thursday calling the latest Taliban decision appalling.

It confirms that Afghanistan's current rulers have "no intention of promoting, respecting or upholding the rights of women and girls, or of honoring the multiple commitments that they have made to Afghan women and to the international community in recent months," they said.

In addition, the co-chairs said the Taliban's decision "shows an utter disregard for the council's clear message that women must play a full, equal and meaningful role in all aspects of public and political life in Afghanistan."

Ireland's UN Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason told reporters women and girls "are now facing

some of the harshest restrictions imaginable," and the international community and the Security Council have "a moral responsibility to act" and condemn Taliban policies that seek to exclude half of Afghanistan's population.

Britain's UN Ambassador Barbara Woodward told reporters after Thursday's closed-door council meeting that ambassadors discussed activities of the UN political mission in Afghanistan, "but really focusing on the situation for women and girls."

Asked about prospects for the Security Council agreeing on the presidential statement, Woodward said, "I very much hope that very shortly we'll be able to agree a product that expresses our collective agreement and concern about these latest developments."

Another Example of Saudi Sportswash

Fiancée 'Hurt' by Downplaying of Khashoggi Murder

ANKARA (Middle East Eye) – The fiancée of the murdered Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi has criticized Australian golf champion Greg Norman over his defense of Saudi Arabia, which is pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into the LIV Golf Invitational Series.

The former world number one is spearheading the Saudi-backed series, seen by rights groups and activists as an example of the kingdom trying to "sportswash" its human rights record.

Taking questions at a promotional event for the \$255mn tournament, Norman, known as "The Shark", said: "This whole thing about Saudi Arabia and Khashoggi and human rights; talk about it, but also talk about the good that the country is doing in changing its culture."

"Everybody has owned up to it, right? It has been spoken about, from what I've read, going on what you guys reported."

"Take ownership, no matter what it is. Look, we've all made mistakes and you just want to learn from those mistakes and how you can correct them going forward."

Khashoggi, a 59-year-old Washington Post columnist, was killed inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on 2 October 2018, in a gruesome murder that shocked the world.

Hatice Cengiz, in a statement issued through her London QC, said it was "hurtful when Jamal's brutal killing is brushed off as a 'mistake' and that we should just move on. Would you say that if it was your loved one?"

Cengiz has previously called for Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to be punished after a declassified U.S. intelligence report said he likely sanctioned the murder in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Norman, 67, is chief executive of LIV Golf

Investments, which is backed by the Saudi Public Investment Fund, which the crown prince chairs.

The PIF is spearheading the kingdom's transition away from petrodollars and investing heavily in sports and entertainment as part of the country's economic diversification plan.

"How can we go forward when those who ordered the murder are still unpunished and continue to try to buy back their legitimacy?" Cengiz said.

"We should not fall for their wealth and lies and lose our morals and common humanity. We should all be insisting on the truth and justice; only then can we look forward with hope and dignity," she added in her statement.

Amnesty International also criticised Norman's remarks, and said Saudi Arabia was using the sport to clean its "blood-soaked image".

Turkey Upholds Prison Sentence for Top Opposition Figure

ANKARA (Middle East Eye) – Turkey's supreme court of appeals has upheld a prison sentence for the head of the Istanbul branch of the country's main opposition party, in a move seen as another crackdown on opponents ahead of next year's presidential election.

The top court on Thursday approved the conviction of Canan Kaftancıoğlu, of the secular Republican People's Party (CHP), on three counts with a prison term of four years, 11 months, and 20 days.

It was not immediately clear if the ruling means Kaftancıoğlu, 50, will be jailed right away.

The CHP is the second-largest party in the Turkish parliament, holding 135 seats.

In 2019, Kaftancıoğlu was sentenced to nearly 10 years in jail on a range of charges including "terrorist propaganda" and insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The charges related mostly to tweets Kaftancıoğlu posted between 2012 and 2017. She had been free pending the appeals.

Among the tweets used by the prosecution against Kaftancıoğlu, was one in which she criticized the death of a 14-year-old boy hit by

a tear gas grenade during the mass "Gezi Park" protests of 2013.

Kaftancıoğlu, a doctor by profession, played a key role in the shock victory of the CHP's Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu in 2019 - the first time Erdogan's party had lost power in Turkey's biggest city for 25 years.

Kaftancıoğlu "is my comrade with whom we are striding together to change Istanbul," Imamoglu stated on Twitter. "I find this decision political and condemn it. I stand by our chairwoman."

Shortly after the Thursday court ruling, CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu called on his lawmakers to head to the party's Istanbul headquarters.

"All lawmakers of our party immediately set off for our Istanbul provincial headquarters," he tweeted.

Rights groups regularly accuse Erdogan of using the judiciary as a political tool, particularly after thousands of judges were purged in the wake of an attempted coup in 2016.

Erdogan railed against Kaftancıoğlu after she was appointed to the Istanbul chair in 2016.