

US military rejects Iraqi demand, offers partial

Agencies

Washington: The US military has offered senior Iraqi security officials plans for a partial withdrawal of troops from Iraq, renege on an earlier promise to leave the Arab country, online news website Middle East Eye (MEE) reports.

It cited unnamed sources as saying that a meeting was held in great secrecy between the two sides in the private residence of the Canadian ambassador to Jordan in Amman last week.

A representative of the US military told the Iraqis that Washington was prepared to leave positions in or near Shia-majority areas, such as Balad airbase which houses US personnel about 80 kilometers north of Baghdad.

The Iraqis were told that Washington could even consider

Ain al-Asad, the biggest US airbase in Anbar province.

"We cannot even start talking about withdrawing [from Ain al-Asad]. Withdrawal is out of the question," the US representative said.

Ain al-Asad airbase came under missile fire from Iran last month, in response to the US assassination of top Iranian commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani, and the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis at Baghdad international airport on January 3.

About 5,300 American forces are deployed across Iraq. Two days after the assassination, the Iraqi parliament approved a motion, calling for the withdrawal of all American forces.

Later on January 9, former Iraqi prime minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi called on the United States



No handshakes

Coronavirus Outbreak Spooks Asian Places Of Worship

Agencies

Manila: In a popular Catholic church in the Philippines, nearly half of the pews were empty for Sunday Mass. The few hundred worshippers who showed up were asked to refrain from shaking others' hands or holding them during prayers to prevent the spread of the virus that started in China.

In Hong Kong, Cardinal John Hon Tong, wearing a mask, announced the suspension of public Masses for two weeks and urged churchgoers to instead watch them online.

Buddhist temples, Christian churches and Muslim mosques have been ordered closed since Jan. 29 in mainland China, where the new coronavirus strain was first detected in the central city of Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak. Mosques have canceled weekly Friday prayers since January under an order to avoid "collective religious activities."

Religious leaders should encourage Muslims to "trust the party" and avoid crowds, the Communist Party-controlled body that oversees China's officially authorized mosques said in a statement.

Coronavirus Philippines religious events, Philippines Coronavirus scare, Coronavirus China

normally popular Suzumushi, or Crickets, temple, a sign read, "Due to the impact of the COVID-19, no waiting expected," using the name given to the disease by the World Health Organization.

Coronavirus Philippines religious events, Philippines Coronavirus scare, Coronavirus China religious group, Indian express news

In this Feb. 10, 2020, photo, a Catholic woman wearing a face mask prays during a mass at the Minor Basilica of San Lorenzo Ruiz in Manila's Chinatown, Philippines. In a popular Catholic church in Manila, nearly half of the pews were empty for Sunday Mass. The few hundred worshippers who showed up, some in protective masks, have been asked to refrain from shaking or holding hands in prayers. (AP)

The restrictions and dwindling crowds in religiously diverse places of worship underscore the extent of the scare over the outbreak that has permeated many aspects of life in the hard-hit Asian region. The virus has killed more than 1,500 people and infected more than 67,000 others, mostly in China, where several cities that are home to more than 60 million people have been placed under lockdown in an unprecedented effort to contain the disease.

All but three of the deaths have been in China. Japan, Hong Kong and the Philippines have reported one fatality each.

In Japan, where Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines are tourist destinations, a sharp decline in the number of foreign visitors has been a palpable setback. At

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"Even in election season, there are red lines," he said.

Billboards in Tel Aviv incite reprisal against Palestinians over rejection of Trump deal

Agencies

Washington: Billboards have appeared on highways in Tel Aviv with hateful messages against Palestinians, in apparent reprisal for their refusal to accept US President Donald Trump's plan for the Middle East, which heavily favors the Israeli regime.

The billboards read "Peace is made ONLY with vanquished enemies" and show photoshopped images of Palestinian President Mah-

moud Abbas and Hamas leader and former prime minister Ismail Haniyeh blindfolded and kneeling in supplication in a war-zone, with buildings behind them reduced to rubble and helicopters hovering.

Former Knesset member of the Meretz Party Issawi Freig slammed the billboards as "disgusting" and urged the mayor of Tel Aviv to remove them. "This disgust must go down now. [Mayor] Ron Huldai, for your care," he said in a tweet.

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Scared and exposed

Rise In Virus Cases Among China's Medics

Agencies

Chengdu, China - Working long, intense hours, Liu was one of the first healthcare workers to come to the front line to fight the coronavirus outbreak that has killed at least 1,770 people and infected 70,548 others in mainland China.

For days, she helped dispense medicine and administer intravenous therapy to infected patients at a crowded hospital in Wuhan, the epicentre of the epidemic.

Then on January 26, just three days after Wuhan was placed under a lockdown, she developed a dry cough and started to get a fever.

Liu could not remember exactly how and when she might have contracted the virus. But by the time she had received her test results, her body temperature had been hovering above 38.5 degrees

scared. "Every time someone comes into the ward, I'd try to hold my breath and not talk, because I'm afraid that the virus would spread that way," said Liu.

"Getting them infected is the last thing I want to do now."

1,716 health workers infected. For the first time since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, China's National Health Commission reported on February 14, that at least 1,716 health workers had been infected while treating patients with the virus. This has raised concerns about the capability of the government to protect the caregivers in direct contact with the afflicted.

Zeng Yixin, the deputy director of China's health commission said during a news conference on Friday that infected medical



Celsius (101.3 Fahrenheit) for over four days.

"When I was admitted to the hospital, a colleague of mine burst into tears and said she was so scared and so tired," said Liu, who asked Al Jazeera to identify her only by her last name.

"At that time, we already had at least 150 colleagues who had either confirmed or suspected to have been infected - we're all very

workers comprise 3.8 percent of all those who have contracted the virus across the country.

He told the public the number would not rise as China was increasing its efforts to ensure that supplies of protective equipment for medics would be adequate.

However, the high number of coronavirus deaths in China has already set off warning bells in the medical community.

Treat Us Like Something Between A Telco And A Newspaper: Zuckerberg

Agencies

California: Online content should be regulated with a system somewhere between the existing rules used for the telecoms and media industries, Facebook Chief Executive Officer Mark Zuckerberg told global leaders and security chiefs on Saturday.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference in Germany, Zuckerberg said Facebook had improved its work countering online election interference, and expanded on his previous calls for regulation of social media firms.

"I do think that there should be regulation on harmful content [...] there's a question about which framework you use for this," Zuckerberg said during a question and answer session.

"Right now there are two frameworks that I think people have for existing industries — there's like newspapers and exist-

ing media, and then there's the telco-type model, which is 'the data just flows through you', but you're not going to hold a telco responsible if someone says something harmful on a phone line."

"I actually think where we should be is somewhere in between," he said.

Facebook and social media giants including Twitter and Alphabet's Google have come under increasing pressure to better combat governments and political groups using their platforms to spread false and misleading information.

Zuckerberg said he now employed 35,000 people to review online content and implement security measures.

Those teams and Facebook's automated technology currently suspend more than one million fake accounts each day, he said, adding that "the vast majority are detected within minutes of signing up."

NEWSMAKERS

AR Rahman's Daughter to 'Suffocating' Taslima: 'Get Some Fresh Air'

New Delhi: Barely a year after AR Rahman's daughter Khatija clarified her stance on wearing a burqa, she has been dragged again by controversial Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen.

Taslima in a tweet wrote that she feels suffocated when she looks at Khatija wearing a burqa at events. She stated, "I absolutely love A R Rahman's music. But whenever I see his dear daughter, I feel suffocated."

But in her stunning response, Khatija Rahman silenced Taslima Nasreen who even called out her Oscar-winning father for his daughters' choice of dress.

Sharing a picture of Khatija in a burqa, Taslima wrote "It is really depressing to learn that even educated women in a cultural family can get brainwashed very easily."

This did not go well with



Khatija and she responded by sharing a series of posts on her Instagram page, telling Taslima to get some fresh air if she finds it suffocating.

Khatija shared a picture of fire along with Carson Kolhoff's quote on her Instagram page and wrote, "Don't ever mistake my silence for ignorance, my calm-

ness for acceptance, or my kindness for weakness - Carson Kolhoff, To my dearest folks who seem suffocated. Please go and get some fresh air."

She then went on to share a screenshot of Taslima's tweet stating that she never sent the writer her photo to be used in the first place. "Been only a year

Twitter explodes with outrage after Trump likens himself to a king

US President Donald Trump has sparked outrage on social media after he called himself "the king," with a famous quote by American philosopher and writer Ralph Waldo Emerson that "when you strike at a king, you must kill him."

Trump picked the quote Saturday from a New York Times article that was published two weeks ago, in which the writer, Peter Baker, had warned that the president would be dangerously unleashed once he was acquitted in the Senate impeachment trial.

"Ralph Waldo Emerson seemed to foresee the lesson of the Senate impeachment trial of President Trump. 'When you strike at a king,' Emerson famously said, 'you must kill him,'" Baker had argued in his February 1 piece, warning that Trump would "emerge from the biggest test of his presidency emboldened."

Even though the article was highly critical of Trump and was published four days before he was acquitted by Senate Republicans, the president



chose to quote those lines with some habitual changes. The president actually capitalized the word king and changed it from "a king" to "the King."

The comment quickly drew outrage among critics and the phrase "you are not a king" almost instantly began to trend on Twitter.

Some Twitter users reminded the president that the Times piece was scathingly negative and wondered why he would choose to promote the article. Many also raised concern that the king quote was a confirmation that Trump was set to run a re-election campaign marred by grievance and resentment.

Queen of Katwe star dies aged 15

Nikita Pearl Waligwa, a Ugandan child actress who starred in a Disney movie on the extraordinary life of a local chess prodigy, has died at the age of 15.

The teenage star of Queen of Katwe died of brain tumour, according to Gayaza High School, which she reportedly attended since 2018.

Waligwa, who played the role of Gloria, a younger friend of the main character in the 2016 film, was "a darling to many", the secondary school wrote on Twitter.

"No words can explain the pain at the moment," it added. Local media reported that Waligwa had first been diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2016. After making a recovery a year later, another tumour was found.

The news prompted an outpouring of grief on social media, users expressing their condolences and recalling her role in the movie directed by Mira Nair and filmed in Katwe, a slum in Uganda's capital, Kampala.

"Nikita Pearl Waligwa was not only a star, but she was also an inspiration to every young girl," read an obituary in the online version of the New Vision, a Ugandan daily newspaper.

Queen of Katwe was based on the true story of Phiona Mutesi, an uneducated girl from the eponymous slum who took up chess in 2005 and overcame overwhelming odds to become the first female winner of Uganda's junior chess championships.