

Qatar emir to meet with Biden in Washington Jan 31: White House

Author:

Wed, 2022-01-26 01:30

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden will receive Qatar's emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad at the White House on Jan. 31, his spokeswoman said Tuesday. Biden and the Gulf state leader will discuss security in the Middle East and "ensuring the stability of global energy supplies," Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement.

The meeting comes as Washington and its European allies are seeking to shore up energy contingency plans should Russia squeeze supplies due to tensions with the West over Ukraine.

The US and its EU allies accuse Russia of seeking to upend European stability by threatening invasion of neighboring Ukraine, a former Soviet republic striving to join NATO and other Western institutions.

The European Union sources about 40 percent of its supply from Russia, and Washington and its European allies have been scouring global markets for alternative energy sources.

Qatar, a close US ally, has huge gas reserves and is the world's biggest exporter of liquefied natural gas.

Psaki said Biden will also thank the emir for Qatar's support to the United States in safely transporting US citizens, permanent residents and Afghan partners out of Afghanistan in the wake of the US withdrawal last year.

Qatar has played a significant role both in diplomacy and evacuations at the end of nearly 20 years of war in Afghanistan.



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US, Qatar discuss gas supplies amid Ukraine invasion fears
Turkey, Qatar reached preliminary deal on Kabul airport security – Turkish sources

[UN Security Council condemns Iraq terror attack, urges all nations to help seek justice](#)

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Tue, 2022-01-25 22:55

NEW YORK: The UN Security Council has unanimously condemned “in the strongest terms” a recent terrorist attack in Iraq’s Diyala Province, and called for all “perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism” to be brought to justice.

At dawn on Friday, Jan. 21, at least 11 Iraqi soldiers were shot dead in their sleep during an attack on their barracks by suspected Daesh gunmen, according to reports citing Iraqi security officials. It happened in the Al-Azim district, a mountainous area more than 70 miles north of the capital, Baghdad.

The Security Council urged all states to actively cooperate with the Iraqi Government in seeking to hold the perpetrators to account, in line with their obligations under international law and the council’s resolutions. It reiterated that terrorism is one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.

In a joint statement, council members reaffirmed that “any acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed.”

They highlighted the need for all states “to combat by all means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and other obligations under international law, including international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law, threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts.”

Council members also shared “their deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the government of Iraq, and they wished a speedy and full recovery to those who were injured.”



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Iraq: Daesh gunmen shoot dead 11 soldiers in 'brazen attack' What prevents Iraq from meeting the youth employment challenge

[Refusal of nations to repatriate children from Syria 'beggars belief,' says UN rights expert](#)

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Tue, 2022-01-25 22:31

NEW YORK: A UN human rights expert on Tuesday voiced serious concern for the well-being of more than 700 children incarcerated at Al-Ghuwayran prison, in Al-Hasakeh in northeast Syria, and called on all countries to repatriate their young citizens held in the country.

The prison was the scene of a deadly attempted jailbreak by hundreds of Daesh insurgents last week.

"Boys as young as 12 are living in fear for their lives amid the chaos and carnage in the jail," said Fionnuala Ni Aolain, the UN's special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism. "They are tragically being neglected by their own countries through no fault of their own except they were born to individuals allegedly linked or associated with designated terrorist groups.

"The treatment of hundreds of boys who have been detained in grotesque prison conditions is an affront to the dignity of the child and the right of every child to be treated with dignity."

Almost 300 detainees have been killed during days of fighting at Al-Ghuwayran, which began last Thursday with the detonation of two car bombs. Clashes are continuing at the prison, which holds more than 5,000 alleged Daesh militants from almost 60 countries. The insurgents had seized control of the children's section of the facility.

Fighters from the opposition Syrian Democratic Forces are said to be closing in on the final section of prison still held by Daesh attackers, as the situation becomes increasingly worrying for inmates.

Humanitarian groups have renewed calls for all governments to repatriate their citizens from Syria.

"The abject refusal of states to repatriate their children is a contributory factor in the security and human rights morass that has ignited in Al-Hasakeh in recent days," said Ni Aolain, who last year sent official letters to 57

governments of countries believed to have citizens in Syrian camps. They include France, Germany, the UK, Finland and the US.

The failure of governments to repatriate detained children, who are victims of terrorism and in need of protection under international law, “beggars belief,” Ni Aolain said.

“Many of these boys, forcibly separated from their mothers and family members in recent years, have been denied their most fundamental human rights their entire lives,” she added.

“They have been held arbitrarily and never participated in any legal process that would justify depriving them of their liberty, and in conditions that constitute torture, cruel and degrading treatment under international law. “Treating boys as a distinct class, refusing to recognize in practice their rights as children, is a form of gender discrimination that has had horrific consequences for these children now caught up in the violent confrontation at Al-Hasakeh prison.”

Ni Aolain called on all states and other entities active in northeastern Syria to ensure that civilians are protected, and for those involved in regaining control of the prison to protect the children held there and prevent further harm coming to them.

Special rapporteurs are independent experts who serve in individual capacities, and on a voluntary basis, on the UN’s Human Rights Council. They are not members of UN staff and are not paid for their work.



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‘Horror scenes’ in Syrian refugee camps amid ‘extremely cold winter’: UN official
Syria Kurdish forces close in on Daesh-controlled prison wing

Opposition group estimates 500,000 COVID-19 deaths in Iran

Tue, 2022-01-25 22:12

LONDON: An Iranian opposition group operating within and outside the Islamic republic has released figures claiming nearly half-a-million people have died from COVID-19 in the country.

According to the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, more than 499,800 virus-related deaths had occurred in Iran, almost four times the latest official toll of 132,274.

In the worst-hit province, Tehran, the PMOI said 116,735 people had lost their lives to COVID-19.

Even by official figures, Iran is the worst-hit country in the Middle East, with deaths and hospitalizations far exceeding those of its neighbors. It was also the first country in the region where the virus was detected.

Official sources have reported that Iran was currently experiencing a fifth wave of COVID-19, with a rising number of cases being linked to the highly transmissible omicron variant.

On Monday, according to the semi-official ISNA news agency, the secretary of Iran's epidemiologist committee said: "If we reimpose all the restrictions today, and if people fully abide by these regulations, the number of our patients will still reach five figures. More than 50 percent of the coronavirus cases are of omicron."

And the spokesman for Isfahan University of Medical Sciences said: "Omicron has become the main variant in (Isfahan) province. During the past week the number of confirmed positive coronavirus cases has reached more than 1,500 cases."

Also on Monday, ISNA reported that the dean of Kerman University of Medical Sciences said: "Expect omicron to flare up in the not-so-distant future. The number of positive coronavirus cases has increased from 30 to 50 percent. Therefore, the alarm bell has sounded."

Iran's COVID-19 outbreak has been blamed in some quarters on regime incompetence and Tehran prioritizing ideology over effective response.

Last year, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei banned the import of British and American-made vaccines, significantly hindering the country's vaccination drive and, critics have said, causing more deaths.

In August, Dr. Mohammed-Reza Zafarghandi, chairman of Iran's non-governmental

licensing and regulatory Medical Council, criticized the vaccine ban, and said: “Mortality has significantly dropped in countries where they vaccinated the population without any limits and setting (political) borders.

“Will those who said vaccine imports should be restricted be accountable today?”



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Iran COVID-19 deaths set new daily record as curbs lifted Official Iranian coronavirus numbers probably underestimated: Radio Farda

[Iran nuclear talks approaching dangerous impasse – UK's Truss](#)

Author:

Tue, 2022-01-25 22:07

LONDON: Talks to revive a 2015 nuclear deal between Western powers and Iran are approaching a dangerous impasse, British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said on Tuesday.

"This negotiation is urgent and progress has not been fast enough. We continue to work in close partnership with our allies but the negotiations are reaching a dangerous impasse," Truss told parliament.

"Iran must now choose whether it wants to conclude a deal or be responsible for the collapse of the JCPOA (nuclear deal). And if the JCPOA collapses, all options are on the table."

Truss also held a phone call with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to discuss how to reach a successful conclusion on talks with Iran on mutual return to implementation of the nuclear deal, the US State Department said. Her comments come a day after a senior member of the US team negotiating with Iran has left the role amid a report of differences of opinion on the way forward, as the urgency to salvage the 2015 Iran nuclear deal intensifies. A State Department official confirmed on Monday that Richard Nephew, US Deputy Special Envoy for Iran, is no longer on the negotiating team, but was still a State Department employee. The official did not give a reason for the change but said personnel moves were 'very common' a year into an administration.

The Wall Street Journal earlier reported that Nephew left after differences of opinion within the US negotiating team on Iran. The paper said he had advocated a tougher posture in the current negotiations.

Iran for the first time Monday said it was open to direct nuclear negotiations with the United States, which declared itself ready to hold talks "urgently" – in a possible turning point in efforts to salvage the 2015 nuclear accord.

Tehran has been engaged since last year in talks with the five other world powers still part of the agreement, which offered sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

After unilaterally withdrawing in 2018 under then-president Donald Trump, Washington has been taking part indirectly in the Vienna negotiations, which seek to bring the United States back into the nuclear accord and ensure Iran returns to its commitments.

But Washington has said on multiple occasions it would prefer to hold direct talks, and on Monday Iran's foreign minister said his country would consider doing so if it proved the key to a "good agreement" to salvage the floundering deal.

"If during the negotiation process we get to a point that reaching a good agreement with solid guarantees requires a level of talks with the US, we will not ignore that in our work schedule," said Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian.

(With Reuters and AFP)



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US 'prepared to meet directly' and 'urgently' with Iran on nuclear issue
Frenchman gets long jail term in Iran; denies spy charges