

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he will fulfill his promise to build a new settlement in the occupied West Bank for the first time in more than 20 years.

Netanyahu made the announcement hours before meeting with Jason Greenblatt, U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy for the Middle East.

The continued expansion of illegal settlements by the Zionist regime is one of the major obstacles to the establishment of "peace" in the Middle East.

Whenever a tradition of the Holy Prophet is related to you, scrutinize it, do not be satisfied with mere verbatim repetition of the same because there are many people who repeat the words containing knowledge but only few ponder over them and try to fully grasp the meaning they convey.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

Saudi Strike on Refugee Boat Kills Dozens Off Yemen Coast



A Yemeni man checks the site of a Saudi air raid that hit a funeral reception in the Arhab district, located 40 kilometers north of the capital Sana'a, on February 16, 2017.

SANAA (Dispatches) – At least 44 people have been killed and dozens of others wounded after a Saudi airstrike hit a refugee boat off Yemen's western coast.

Yemen's al-Masirah television reported that the boat which came under attack was carrying Somali

refugees near Bab al-Mandeb Strait. According to the report, there are a number of women and children among the victims.

A local official in Hudaydah said that the boat had come under attack by an Apache helicopter.

The refugees were on their way

from Yemen to Sudan, the unnamed official said.

Hours later, Yemeni soldiers and fighters from allied Popular Committees launched a BM-21 Grad rocket at a gathering of Saudi-sponsored militiamen loyal to resigned Yemeni president Abd

Rabbuh Mansur Hadi in Wadi Namlah area of Nihm district in Yemen's western-central province of Sana'a, though no report of casualties was immediately available.

Early on Friday, Saudi warships shelled the coast of Tuhayta district in Hudaydah province, but there were no reports on possible casualties and the extent of damage caused.

Saudi Arabia has been leading a deadly military campaign against Yemen since March 2015. The kingdom has also imposed an aerial and naval blockade on its southern neighbor.

Britain and the U.S. have provided huge amounts of arms and military training to the Saudi forces.

According to the United Nations humanitarian coordinator for Yemen, Jamie McGoldrick, the Saudi military campaign has claimed the lives of 10,000 Yemenis and left 40,000 others wounded.

McGoldrick told reporters in Sana'a earlier this year that the figure was based on casualty counts given by health facilities and that the actual number might be higher.

Local Yemeni sources have already put the death toll from the Saudi war at over 12,000, including many women and children.

Iraqi PM Calls for Reduction of U.S. Troops



Members of the Iraqi forces prepare to fly a military drone over the northern Iraqi city of Mosul on March 14, 2017, to be used in the fight against Daesh.

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has called on the U.S. to reduce its military presence in his country as Washington has begun a surge of troops in the face of Daesh terrorists facing a final rout in the country.

"As we are crushing Daesh, it is clear that there is a need to reduce the number of our allies who are helping us," Abadi told the Middle East Eye news portal.

He made the remarks ahead of his visit to Washington to meet U.S. President Donald Trump.

"Daesh is about to collapse and is on the verge of defeat. Their family members are fleeing," he said.

Abadi, however, noted that Baghdad wants the U.S. to expand its training of the Iraqi army, federal police and local police.

"We have to strengthen our armed forces and security forces and this will need a lot of help from our allies to give proper training," the Iraqi premier said.

Iraqi forces and allied fighters had gained control of the eastern side of Mosul in January, after 100 days of fighting.

They have managed to liberate several areas of western Mosul, a city divided into two halves by Tigris River.

On Thursday morning, Iraqi soldiers were trying to encircle Mosul's Old City to bottle up Daesh terrorists, but military officials say the operations have been slowed due to bad weather as well as the bombs and booby traps planted across the combat area.

"Operations in the Mosul west Old City have been halted on Thursday due to bad, rainy weather. We can't advance without airstrikes cover due to the fog," Reuters quoted an Iraqi Rapid Response unit as saying.

More than 150,000 people have fled fighting in and around the western side of Mosul since security forces launched an operation to retake the area from Daesh terrorists.

According to Iraq's Ministry of Migration and Displaced, civilians continue to leave Mosul's western side as armed forces are struggling to dislodge Daesh terrorists from their last urban stronghold in the country.

The ministry said 152,857 people have so far fled the operation zone since February 19, when the battle began. In the figures released on Wednesday, the International Organization for Migration had put the number of those who have escaped at nearly 100,000.

Interior Minister: Lebanon Should Integrate Hezbollah Militarily

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – The Lebanese interior minister says Lebanon should integrate the resistance movement of Hezbollah's armed strength in its military strategy.

"The defense strategy should determine how to benefit from Hezbollah's arms, to fend off any [future] Israeli aggression," Interior Minister Nouhad Machnouk told the Egyptian satellite channel Capital Broadcast Center, according to Lebanese paper The Daily Star.

The military wing of the Hezbollah movement defended Lebanon against the Zionist wars in 2000 and 2006, forcing the occupying regime's military into withdrawal.

Machnouk said Hezbollah's military strength had to be discussed in the context of "the tactical planning of Lebanon's defense strategy."

The remarks came only three days after an extremist Zionist minister said the occupying regime had to hit civilian targets in Lebanon in a future war to make life miserable for the Lebanese.

Zionist Education Minister Naftali Bennett said, "Life in Lebanon today is not bad" compared to Syria, adding Tel Aviv had to target civilians in a potential war with the country and send it "back to the Middle Ages."

"Today, Hezbollah is embedded in sovereign Lebanon. It is part of the government and, according to the [Lebanese] president, also part of its security forces," Israeli newspaper Haaretz quoted Bennett as saying.

Last month, Lebanese President Michel Aoun said Hezbollah's military capabilities "do not contradict the state's."

"As long as Israel occupies land and covets the natural resources of Lebanon, and as long as the Lebanese military lacks the power to stand up to Israel, [Hezbollah's] arms are essential," Aoun said then.

Hezbollah has also been fighting to prevent and contain the spillover into Lebanon of a terrorist campaign in neighboring Syria.

The Zionist regime has attacked Hezbollah targets in Syrian territory in the past.

UN Report Slams Zionist Regime's 'Apartheid' on Palestinians

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – A new UN report says the Zionist regime has been imposing an "apartheid regime" of racial discrimination against the Palestinian people.

The report, commissioned by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), said that "Israel has established an apartheid regime that dominates the Palestinian people as a whole."

The study, which has been authored by Richard Falk, a former UN human rights investigator for the Palestinian territories, and Virginia Tilley, a professor of political science at Southern Illinois University, said the "strategic fragmentation of the Palestinian people" was the main method through which the occupying regime imposes apartheid.

Falk, who has served as the UN special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories, had said the occupying regime's policies had unacceptable characteristics of colonialism, apartheid and ethnic

cleansing.

On the "basis of scholarly inquiry and overwhelming evidence," the report said, "Israel is guilty of the crime of apartheid."

"However, only a ruling by an international tribunal in that sense would make such an assessment truly authoritative," it said.

The new finding divides Palestinians into four groups oppressed through "distinct laws, policies and practices."

The report also identifies the four sets of Palestinians as Palestinian citizens of the occupied territories, Palestinians in occupied East al-Quds, Palestinians in the West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip, and Palestinians living as refugees or in exile.

The ESCWA, which comprises 18 Arab countries in West Asia, hoped the report prompt action by the UN.

Speaking at an event to launch the report at the ESCWA's Beirut headquarters, UN Under-Secretary General and ESCWA Executive Secretary Rima Khalaf emphasized



Zionist troops detain a Palestinian protester during clashes on March 7, 2017, near Ofer Prison in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

that the report was the "first of its type" from a UN body that "clearly and frankly concludes" that "racist" regime "has established an apartheid system that persecutes the Palestinian people."

In December last year, the UN Security Council passed a resolution censuring the occupying regime for its settlement activities

in the occupied Palestinian territories after the U.S. refused to veto it, reversing its longstanding policy of shielding the regime from condemnatory resolutions at the world body.

It also said the construction of Israeli settlements has "no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law."

"Authorities also made little progress in holding officials accountable for the mistreatment and torture of detainees," it said, adding that Manama had even approved trial of civilians at military tribunals.

HRW also called the council's attention to the postponed trial of human rights lawyer Nabeel Rajab, who remains incarcerated and faces charges that violate his right to free speech.

Anti-regime protesters have held

UN Censured for Inaction Against Bahrain Regime

MANAMA (Press TV) – Human Rights Watch has voiced its deep concerns over the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)'s failure to address the situation in Bahrain.

"The situation in Bahrain deteriorated further in the latter half of 2016. The government has intensified its attacks on rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association," said a report released by the rights group.

It stressed that the Al Khalifah

regime has been emboldened by the international community's silence on Manama's human rights violations, and called on the UNHRC to take immediate measures against the worsening situation in the country.

The group also called for attention to Manama's dissolution of the main opposition group, the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, and its arbitrary stripping of citizenship of those critical of the government.