

MANAMA (Press TV) – Bahraini people have held fresh anti-regime protest rallies across the kingdom in support of prominent Shia opposition cleric Sheikh Issa Qassim ahead of his trial session. The protesters took to the streets throughout the country, including in the capital, Manama, the village of Sanabis in the capital's countryside, and the island of Sitra in eastern Bahrain.

Over 12,000 Civilians Killed in Saudi war



Yemeni infants suffering from malnutrition wait for treatment in the hallway of a medical center in Bani Hawat, on the outskirts of the Yemeni capital Sana'a, on January 9, 2017.

SANAA (Dispatches) – Almost two years into the Saudi war on Yemen, a rights NGO says the military campaign has cost the lives of more than 12,000 civilians.

Yemen's Legal Center for Rights and Development, an independent monitoring group, in a report released on Thursday put the civilian death toll in war-torn Arab country at 12,041.

The fatalities, it said, comprise 2,568 children and 1,870 women.

The rights body said the bombings have also wounded 20,001 civilians, including 2,354 children and 1,960 women, while more than four million others have been displaced.

In a latest development, two Saudi troops have been killed in attacks carried out by Yemen's army soldiers

and allied fighters against targets inside the kingdom, the al-Masirah television network says.

A Saudi officer was killed by sniper fire at the al-Karas military base in the southwestern Jizan region, while rocket fire killed a policeman in Dhahran al-Janub in the Asir region late Wednesday.

Saudi Arabia's civil defense department said the second attack also left a civilian wounded. Department spokesman, Colonel Mohammed Abdulrahim al-Asemi, identified the slain policeman as Mubarak bin Saleh al-Qahtani.

Over the past two years, at least 128 Saudis have been killed in the country's south, some in skirmishes on the Yemeni border and others in retaliation

rocket fire.

'Millions at risk of malnutrition'

The World Health Organization has warned of a deepening health crisis in Yemen, which is under Saudi military aggression, saying lack of funds is putting millions of Yemenis at risk of disease and malnutrition.

Nevio Zagaria, WHO's acting representative in Yemen, said in a statement that nearly 15 million Yemenis lacked access to essential health services.

"With more than 14.8 million people lacking access to basic health-care, the current lack of funds means the situation will get much worse," media outlets quoted Zagaria as saying.

The WHO official said that about 4.5 million Yemenis, including 2 million children, need assistance in treating or preventing malnutrition, a 150-percent increase since late 2014.

"We urgently need resources to help support the health system as a whole, and are calling on donors to scale up their support before more innocent lives are lost unnecessarily," Zagaria noted.

The agency says only 45 percent of Yemen's health facilities are fully functional and accessible.

According to WHO, highly-specialized medical staff have left the country, and the health workers that have remained have not received regular salaries since September.

Iraqi Army Pushes Deeper Into West Mosul

BAGHDAD (Press TV) – Iraqi armed forces are pushing deeper in the western Daesh-held half of Mosul, entering the first residential neighborhood in the area in yet another blow to the terror group in its last urban stronghold in the Arab state.

The Iraqi forces recaptured a military base and a village southwest of Mosul and entered the residential neighborhood, Sami al-Aridhi, a lieutenant general in the Counter-Terrorism Service, said Friday.

The latest gains came a day after Iraqi ground troops, backed by the air force, managed to regain full control of the Mosul airport following heavy clashes with Daesh terrorists, who had planted mines and booby traps throughout the disused complex.

The Popular Mobilization Forces, called Hashd al-Sha'abi in Arabic, also helped secure the main roads west of Mosul, largely cutting the Iraqi city off Daesh bastion in neighboring Syria.

Iraqi federal police and elite Rapid Response units of the Interior Ministry are now engaged in clean-up operations inside the airport, which will serve as an army airbase in the area in the operations to liberate Mosul's western half.

On a separate front, Iraqi forces with the Counter Terrorism Services (CTS) on Friday recaptured the Ghozlani military base, a gain



Iraqi forces enter a village south of Mosul airport on February 23, 2017 during an offensive to recapture western Mosul from Daesh terrorists.

which facilitated their push towards the southwestern Mosul districts of Tal al-Rumman and al-Mamoun, Reuters quoted a military spokesman as saying on Friday.

Reports say the terrorists operating in the area have resorted to bomb attacks and drone operations to slow down the advances of CTS force.

"There is a resistance there. The drones are particularly annoying today," said Major General Sami al-Aridi, a senior CTS commander.

The military operations west of Mosul come after Iraqi forces managed to drive Daesh out of the eastern sector of the city, which is divided by Tigris River.

The offensive for western Mosul

is estimated to be more difficult than the battle in city's eastern sector given the old neighborhoods and narrow streets in the current operation zone.

Meanwhile, there are also concerns over the situation of some 750,000 civilians trapped in Mosul's western districts.

International aid organizations have warned against the mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of civilians from Mosul in the wake of the final stage of the battle to recapture the city from Daesh terrorists.

Makeshift camps are being built up in nine cities near Mosul, and tents are being pitched in existing camps to accommodate up to 400,000 internally displaced people.

Zionist Regime to Stop Issuing Work Visas to HRW Staff



A Zionist trooper scuffles with a Palestinian demonstrator in the West Bank town of al-Khalil during a protest after Friday prayers against the regime's settlements on February 17, 2017.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Human Rights Watch, which has written several critical reports about the Zionist regime's occupation of Palestinian lands, says the regime in Tel Aviv is set to stop issuing work visas to its staff.

The New-York based rights group had applied for work visas for its Israel and Palestine director, American citizen Omar Shakir, a month ago, but Tel Aviv informed the rights group on February 20 that the request was rejected, the watchdog said in a Friday statement.

HRW further said it had been informed by Tel Aviv that the request had been rejected because it was "not a real human rights group."

Emmanuel Nahshon, spokesman for the Zionist regime's foreign ministry, confirmed the decision, saying that HRW "demonstrated time and again it is a fundamentally biased and anti-Israeli organization with a clear hostile agenda."

"Why should we give working visas to people whose only purpose is to besmirch us and to attack us?" the regime's spokesman asked.

In response to Tel Aviv's decision, Shakir said the HRW is "genuinely shocked," and said, "We work in over 90 countries across the world. Many governments do not like our well-researched findings but their response is not to stifle the messenger."

Shakir also said the Zionist regime's authorities told the HRW that the visa ban was not targeting him alone, but would be applied to all foreign members of the organization.

In 2016, HRW published a report, titled "Occupation Inc.," highlighting how international and Israeli firms in Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank were involved in human rights violations.

Meanwhile, the Tel Aviv regime

has prevented five European parliamentarians from entering the Gaza Strip as the Palestinian enclave remains under a Zionist siege.

Neoklis Sylikiotis, a Cypriot Member of the European Parliament (MEP), denounced the regime's obstruction of the lawmakers' access to the Palestinian coastal sliver.

"The refusal of access to Gaza by the Israeli authorities to the European Parliament on arbitrary grounds is unacceptable," the statement read.

However, the regime claimed that the MEPs were not among those allowed to enter the Gaza Strip.

Similar European delegations have been barred from Gaza since 2011 though a team led by the head of the European Parliament's budget committee was allowed to visit once, the statement added.

"What is there to hide from us?" it further asked, condemning the Zionist regime's "systematic" entry bans to Gaza.

It also called on the international community to pressure the Tel Aviv regime to lift the Gaza blockade that has been in place since June 2007 and affected almost all the two million inhabitants of the enclave.

The World Bank and the United Nations say the Gaza siege has killed all exports and damaged the Palestinian territory's economy.

Tel Aviv has waged three wars on Gaza since 2008, including the 2014 offensive that left more than 2,200 Palestinians dead.

UAE Signs Arms Deals Worth \$5bn At Abu Dhabi Exhibition



A general view of visitors walking in a showroom displaying armored military vehicles during the opening of the International Defense Exhibition and Conference (IDEX) in Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) – The United Arab Emirates has signed contracts worth a total of more than \$5bn for weapons displayed at its international arms fair in Abu Dhabi.

The four-day International Defense Exhibition and Conference (IDEX), which began Sunday and concluded on Thursday, is one of the largest arms fairs in the Middle East and is held every two years.

The UAE, a key partner in the bloody Saudi war on Yemen, signed an order with Raytheon of the United States worth more than \$740m but also with Russian arms exporter Rosoboroneport for anti-tank missiles valued at \$710m.

The final day on Wednesday resulted in contracts worth \$930m, organizers said, raising the total

for the four days to \$5.2bn.

About 100 British companies, including the BAE Systems, Raytheon's UK chapter, and the European missile manufacturer MBDA's British branch, were in the show.

During the event, the American and British companies displayed some of their weapons which have been used in the Saudi war on Yemen with the permission of their respective governments since March 2015.

Raytheon showcased its Paveway IV guided bombs. British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon confirmed last year that the Saudi air force had used the Scottish-built bombs and British-supplied missiles in Yemen.

The BAE Systems displayed its

Hawk Advanced Trainer aircraft, 30 of which Saudi Arabia bought last February, amid reports that Riyadh widely uses the aircraft to train its pilots, who carry out sorties over Yemen.

Among the items on display was the Eurofighter warplane, which has been jointly developed by the BAE Systems, France's Airbus and Italian aeronautics company Alenia Aermacchi.

London sent an official to the event, sparking criticism from human rights activists and some opposition figures.

MP Tom Brake, Liberal Democrats' foreign affairs spokesman, said, "The weapons on display at IDEX, many of which have been deployed by the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen to murderous effect, must serve as a chilling reminder to the UK government of their obligation to suspend arms sales to Saudi."

The UK's Minister for Defense Procurement, MP Harriett Baldwin, who had joined the exhibition on the British government's orders, however, said "It is wonderful to be celebrating the ties that we have between our two countries and the important role that UK firms play in terms of security and prosperity of the [Persian] Gulf states."

The U.S. and the UK have on several occasions come under fire for their arms sales to the parties involved in the Saudi military campaign in Yemen.