

Thousands Mark Palestinian Prisoners' Day

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Zionist troops have attacked protesters marking Palestinian Prisoners' Day throughout the occupied territories.

Zionist troops used rubber bullets and teargas to suppress a demonstration in the occupied West Bank city of Bethlehem.

Some 1,500 people were taking part in the demonstration in a show of support for some 6,500 Palestinian prisoners being held in the Zionist regime's jails, and in solidarity for a mass hunger strike that began on Monday.

The protesters were carrying banners which read, "We do not forget you, our heroic prisoners" and "The night of the prison cell won't last, the night of the prison cell is short lived."

After being attacked by Zionist troops, several Palestinian protesters had to be treated for tear and smoke gas inhalation.

Similar protests were held throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Large numbers of people gathered in the West Bank city of al-Khalil in a show of unity with the prisoners.

"The unity of prisoners in occupation prisons will leave the Palestinian street unified behind them," said the head of the Palestinian Prisoners society in Hebron, Amjad Najjar. "Unity against the Israeli occupation's arrogance has always been and still is Palestinian prisoners' message to all," he added.

According to a report released by three Palestinian non-governmental organizations, a total



Zionist troops take aim at protesters marking Palestinian Prisoners' Day in West Bank city of Bethlehem on April 17, 2017.

of 6,500 Palestinians, including women, children and lawmakers, are being held in prisons and detention facilities across the occupied territories.

Palestinian inmates regularly hold hunger strikes in protest against the administrative detention policy and their harsh prison conditions.

Hundreds of Palestinians in the Zionist regime's jails began a hunger strike on Monday in response to a call by prominent prisoner Marwan Barghouti, widely seen as a possible future Palestinian president.

Palestinians termed the open-ended strike a protest against poor conditions and an Israeli policy of detention without trial that has

been applied against thousands since the 1980s.

The occupying regime said the move by the prisoners, many of whom were convicted of attacks or planning attacks against Israel, was politically motivated.

The protest was led by Barghouti, 58, a leader of the mainstream Fatah movement of the Palestine Liberation Organization, serving five life terms over role in a 2000-2005 uprising.

The strike, if sustained, could present a challenge to the Zionist regime and raise tensions between the two sides as the 50th anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, East al-Quds and the Gaza Strip approaches in June.

Zionist troops and settlers pulled out of the Gaza Strip, now run by Hamas, in 2005, but talks on the creation of a Palestinian state collapsed with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in 2014.

In an opinion piece in the New York Times on Monday, Barghouti said a strike was the only way to gain concessions after other options had failed.

"Through our hunger strike, we seek an end to these abuses ... Palestinian prisoners and detainees have suffered from torture, inhumane and degrading treatment and medical negligence. Some have been killed while in detention," he wrote.

Planemakers ...

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At Boeing's suggestion, Iranian representatives are now inspecting the Turkish configuration to see whether the airlines could swap deliveries, Fakhrieh-Kashan confirmed.

Iran has ordered 15 777-300ERs as part of a deal for 80 Boeing jets. They are crucial to Boeing's efforts to steady declining 777 production, pending the arrival of a new model.

Bringing forward Boeing's first delivery to Iran since the 1970s could also provide broader momentum to the sanctions pact, hampered by funding problems and uncertainty about the attitude of U.S. President Donald Trump who has said he dislikes it.

Since all planemakers need U.S. export licenses due to the number of U.S. parts in their planes, any decision to block the Boeing deals would likely halt European activities in Iran too.

"It helps to bring Boeing to the same table as everyone else," said a senior European industry executive, referring to the talks to swap Turkish and Iranian deliveries.

Rouhani's aides have however been forced to defend the reshuffling from suggestions that Iran is getting cast-off airplanes. They stress the Avianca jets, for example, had been sitting unused for two years and had never flown commercially.

"It is good for Airbus and Boeing, but this is part of the game that everyone knows," Fakhrieh-Kashan told Reuters.

Yemenis ...

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Increased military support for Saudi Arabia could fuel controversy over the air campaign, which has killed many civilians and destroyed infrastructure, including hospitals.

U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Tuesday a political solution through UN-brokered negotiations is needed to resolve the conflict in Yemen as he made his first trip in the role to Saudi Arabia.

Seven ceasefires brokered between Saudi allies and Yemeni forces by the United Nations have failed while UN-backed peace talks have repeatedly broken down.

"We will work with our allies, with our partners to try to get it to the UN-brokered negotiating table," Mattis said.

He gave no details on what additional support, if any, the United States would provide to Saudi Arabia. But he said he was looking to deepen and broaden the relationship between the two countries on the trip.

Mattis was expected to meet senior Saudi officials including King Salman and Deputy Crown Prince and Defense Minister Muhammad bin Salman.

U.S. ...

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The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which includes a large contingent from the powerful Kurdish YPG militia, has advanced towards Raqqa with the help of airstrikes and U.S. special forces.

The SDF said local officials had been setting up the council for six months.

A preparatory committee met "with the people and important tribal figures of Raqqa city to find out their opinions on how to govern it", the SDF said in a statement.

Spokesman Talal Selo said the SDF would "provide all the support" and had already turned over some towns around Raqqa city to the council.

The extent of Kurdish control in Raqqa's future is sensitive both for residents and for Ankara, which has fought a three-decade Kurdish insurgency inside Turkey and fears growing YPG ascendancy just over the border in northern Syria.

The United States says a final decision has yet to be made on how and when Raqqa will be captured.

But the SDF is pressing its assault near the city to isolate and ultimately take Raqqa while plans for rule take shape.

The establishment of a local council allied to the SDF in Raqqa could expand a sphere of Kurdish influence that has grown in northern Syria during the six-year, multi-sided conflict. It would mirror governing arrangements put in place in the Manbij area.

Ex-IRGC ...

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Syrian opposition had claimed forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad had used a chemical gas on people in the Northwestern province, killing nearly 80 and injuring 200. Syrian president argued his government has no chemical weapons after agreeing to have them destroyed in 2013. He also ruled out having used chemicals against own people.

Turkish Helicopter Transporting Senior Officials Crashes



The photo shows a Turkish police helicopter hovering over a member of security forces in western Turkey, February 20, 2017.

ANKARA (Dispatches) – At least 14 people have been killed in an incident where a helicopter transporting senior police and judiciary officials crashed in

southeastern Turkey.

Officials said the police helicopter had 12 people on board when it crashed in the eastern province of Tunceli during the early hours of

Tuesday.

Security sources said two judges were on board the helicopter as well as seven police officers.

The rest of the casualties were crew members, the sources said, without elaborating whether people at the scene of the incident were also affected.

Other reports in local media said eight police officers were killed in the crash. They said the helicopter crashed in an area between Pulumur and Ovacik districts.

Heavy fog in the region made the rescue operation for the Sikorsky S-70 Black Hawk helicopter difficult, Turkish media reports said.

A military unit, comprising staff from Turkey's Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), were immediately dispatched to the

scene of the incident for search and rescue.

There was no official report about the potential cause of the crash. Local media said heavy rainfall and fog could have been a major issue while security sources said they suspected bad weather conditions.

Southeastern Turkey has been subject to long periods of state of emergency over the past two years. Turkish security forces and judicial officials have been the target of attacks by suspected militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The attacks intensified after Ankara launched a massive crackdown on the PKK.

The Turkish military says thousands of militants have been killed in the crackdown while pro-Kurdish parties challenge the figure, saying most of those killed have been civilians.

Clashes Erupt Between Local Tribes, Militants in Sinai

CAIRO (Press TV) – Three civilians have sustained injuries in clashes between militants and local tribes in Egypt's volatile Sinai Peninsula, where the government is battling a Daesh-led insurgency.

Egyptian security sources said clashes erupted on the outskirts of the border town of Rafah, located 340 kilometers east of the capital, Cairo.

The sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the injuries were the result of an RPG attack launched by the militants on a truck allegedly smuggling cigarettes into the area.

The officials noted that the Sunday attack had been in response to an earlier kidnapping of three militants by the local tribes.

The Sinai Peninsula has been

under a state of emergency since October 2014, after a deadly terrorist attack left 33 Egyptian soldiers dead.

Over the past years, militants have been carrying out anti-government activities and fatal attacks, taking advantage of the turmoil caused in Egypt after the democratically-elected president, Mohamed Morsi, was ousted by

a military-led coup in July 2013.

The Velayat Sinai militant group, previously known as Ansar Bait al-Maqdis, has claimed responsibility for most of the assaults, mainly targeting the army and police. In November 2014, the group pledged allegiance to the Daesh terrorist group, which is mainly operating in Iraq and Syria.